

• Hands-On: First StarSight TV •

VIDEO

magazine

#1 IN HOME
THEATER & VIDEO
TECHNOLOGY

Small Dish Mania

How DSS Is
Making
Satellite TV
Sizzle

DIGITAL CES

Tomorrow's
Technology
Plus Latest
TVs, VCRs, Home
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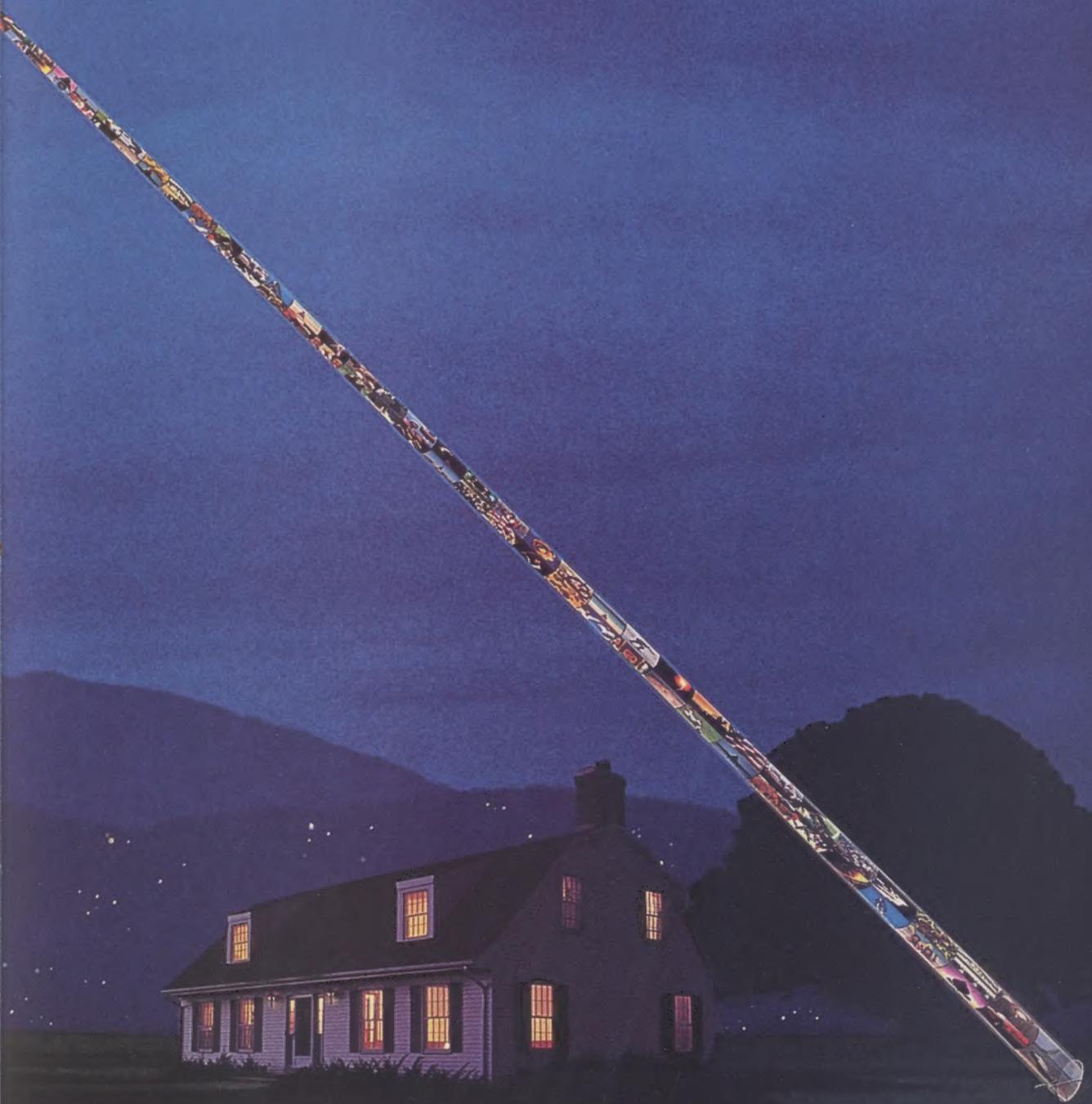
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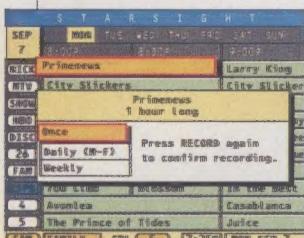
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RCA's Digital Satellite System: dish, receiver, smart card and remote. Photograph by Gene Colman

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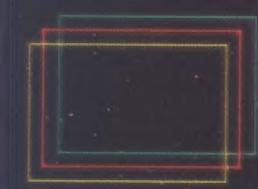
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TVs and power, part 2

Last October, we noted that the U.S. Department of Energy was getting ready to set energy consumption limits for TVs, effectively requiring manufacturers to slice the power TVs use by nearly a third. The goal was energy conservation. The means, we felt, were misguided. We pointed out that TVs use relatively little power, and that TV makers have been cutting power levels on their own. Of more concern, we noted that the department's proposed regulation would force TV makers to strip popular, useful features from their sets, and could hinder the development of new TV-based technologies. Readers were outraged, and let us know in dozens of letters condemning the rule as an act of bureaucratic interference.

The Dept. of Energy appears to have listened. It recently announced it would re-examine the data used to write its regulation. In other words, it will calculate TV power needs based on modern, feature-filled sets, not the old, no-frills models it originally used. The Electronics Industry Association, which prodded the department to think twice about its power math, praised the action as a "first step," but still thinks "this proposal should be killed entirely."

We can't help but agree. If manufacturers have to segregate the circuits for picture-in-picture, second tuners, hi-fi sound, image enhancers and the like into external boxes designed to plug into TVs, power use would jump instead of shrink. Considering all the features today's TVs pack, they're already energy bargains.

"Small Dish Mania," this month's cover story, will bring readers up to date on the extraordinary success of the Digital Satellite System, which is selling as fast as receivers can be made. As contributing editor Jonathan Takiff shows, the system continues to expand, with new products, programs, services, picture enhancements and channels.

We also call your attention to contributing editor Frank Beacham's "Special Report" about the multi-gigabyte movie CDs being developed by competing groups of companies. While details of the format (possibly formats) are still to be completed, the discs' introduction sometime next year promises to be a watershed event in the story of video.

This issue also introduces "Home Theater Forum." It's a new way of looking at and listening to high-octane components for your favorite room, which is what we'll be doing in our favorite room, *Video Magazine's* Home Theater Facility. We'll be auditioning components that can help enhance your system's performance, and talking about how to make sure you're getting the best your system can deliver.

Stan Pinkwas

Stan Pinkwas
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VIDEO

magazine

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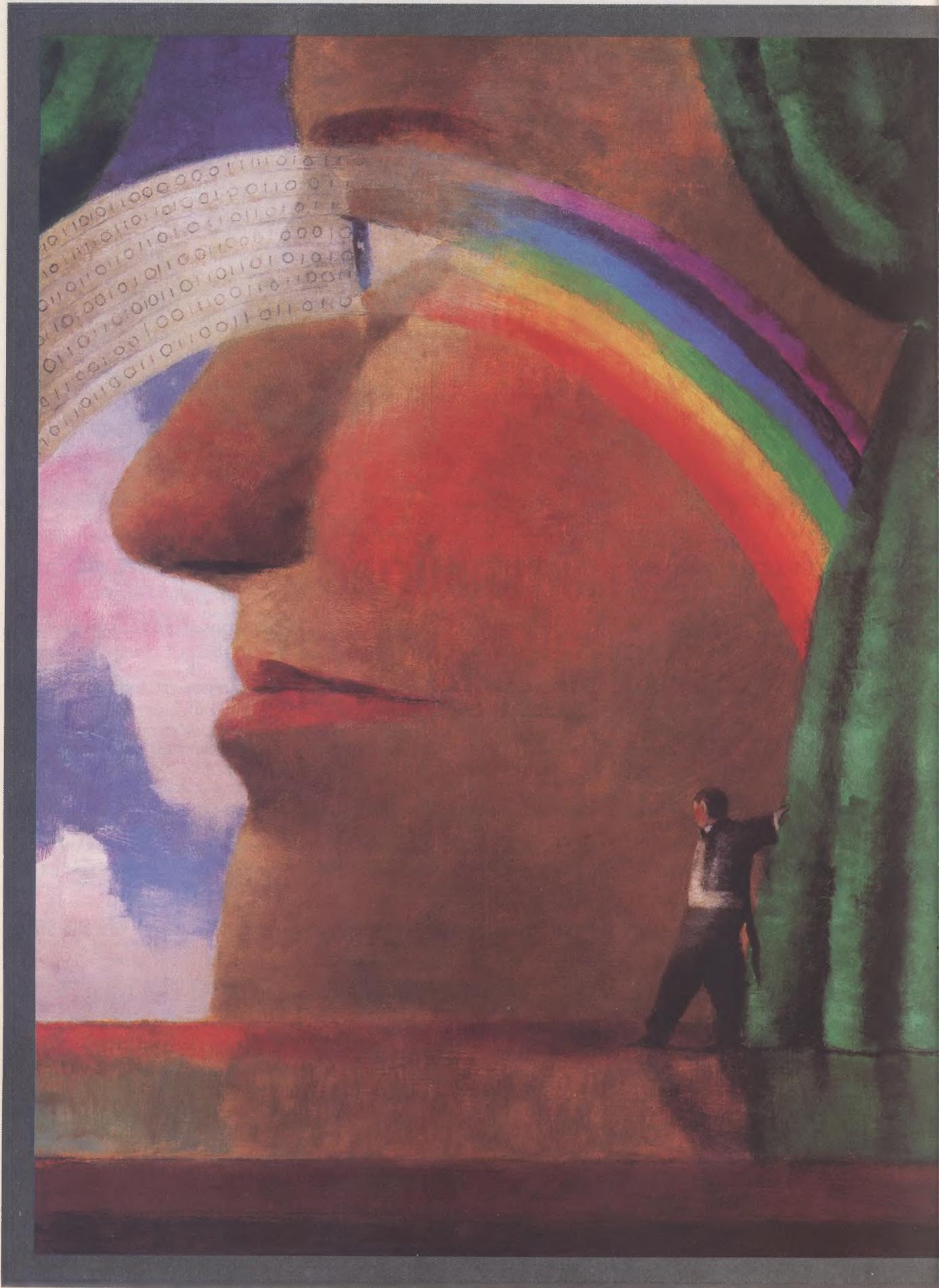
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We've all heard a lot of talk about the *Digital Age*. But what have we seen? Here ends the hype, the hyperbole and all those other "h" words. Introducing the RCA Digital Satellite System. That's not another announcement. That's a fact. Twenty-two thousand miles above the equator are twin satellites using advanced digital technology to give you the kind of picture and sound that will completely rewrite the television history books.



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get caught with your technological pants down either. The DSS system has a wide-band data port. So when HDTV comes along, you'll be ready.[†] In fact, we're playing a major role in the development of HDTV. This is not fiction. It's reality. The DSS system could be in your

living room tomorrow. So, what are you waiting for? **Changing Entertainment. Again.™** **RCA**



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VIDEO ADVERTISER

Q&A

Kelly Ford, Director of Marketing for The Electronic Mailbox, discusses what's new in video products.

Q What's new and exciting in home video editing?

A By far the hottest thing in home video editing is desktop video. With Sima's new PC Ed/it, anyone can edit and rearrange scenes of their home videos with ease and accuracy — right on their computer — for under \$100! Fast Electronics and ADDA Technologies offer several products that let consumers use their 386 PC or better to create titles and add special effects. Today, you can turn your computer into a digital video mixer with effects like ChromaKey, A/B rolls and dissolves for under \$500. The most important thing to remember is only buy desktop video products from retailers who offer technical support and some kind of satisfaction guarantee.

Q What are the hot new products in video accessories?

A Sunpak Memory-Free and Lenmar NoMem batteries. These batteries not only offer consumers longer running times, but their technology prevents them from getting battery memory. Battery memory is the problem that turns your two-hour battery into a five-minute one. With these batteries you just charge it up on your existing battery charger and get a full running time, every time. The Sunpak Memory-Free batteries come with a lifetime warranty, and they have just introduced a new model for Canon camcorders.

Q Any other hot new products for our readers to look for?

A JVC has just introduced a universal editor, the EdiTool, which requires no hook-up and is easy to use. Now anyone can edit their home videos from the comfort of their living room. Ambico has introduced a whole new line of video production equipment.



Letters from our readers

See the difference

I would like to thank you for the "Home Theater" column about TV calibration (Oct. '94). I had my Mitsubishi 50-inch rear-projection set calibrated by a local pro recommended by the Imaging Science Foundation. The result of his efforts was nothing short of astounding, transforming the set's bluish whites into pure and vivid ones. Flesh tones are more realistic and color accuracy has distinctly improved. I urge other *Video Magazine* readers to consider having this service performed. You won't believe the difference.

Robert McLean
Bethpage, New York

Keep it simple

Sherwood's RV-5030R ("Best of the Year," Jan.) is a smart, inexpensive, great-sounding, no-frills home theater receiver. Why should I have to spend



Sherwood RV-5030R A/V Receiver

lots of money for silly surround modes, S-video jacks, etc.? I want quality sound without paying \$1,000. Add NHT's SuperZero speakers and an SW-2P subwoofer and you will have a great-sounding system, with money to spare for things you *really* need, like RCA's DSS system or a widescreen TV.

George Owens
Port Angeles, Washington

Masked by design

In response to Joe Redifer's letter (Feb.) on letterboxing versus pan-and-scan, he should check his copies again. There is indeed extra picture on the left and right side of the frame of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and more detail on the top and bottom. But it wasn't intended to be seen that way by the director. James Cameron's film is in a seldom-used format called Super 35, which achieves a widescreen look without using widescreen lenses. It is rectangular, but not wide enough for "widescreen," so it is masked for theatrical release and laserdiscs.

With the unmasked full-screen video version, you see visual information that you were never intended to see, such as production assistants and equipment or stunt people that are rightfully cropped by the masking. Here, less is more. I'll stick to my beautiful letterbox version.

Conrad P. Felber
Sudbury, Ontario
Canada

Logos drive me

When a person buys a new car, he does not expect to see Ford's or GM's logo on the windshield while driving. Why should we have to watch the logos of stations such as The Family Channel, Arts and Entertainment and Turner Classic Movies in the righthand corners of television screens when we have already paid to see the program? This practice has become an intrusive new form of advertising.

Walter Oleksy
Evanston, Illinois

Best of the best?

Brent Butterworth's review ("Video tests," Oct. '94) of the Toshiba TW56-D90 observes that the TV has a horizontal hot spot, and adds, "Make sure you'll be able to watch the set with your head within a foot of the vertical screen axis." Given this, how can you name the Toshiba the Best Widescreen TV of 1994?

George Heidel
Redding, California

Editor's Reply: We chose Toshiba's TW56D90 as the Best Widescreen TV because its picture is definitely the best among the widescreen sets we've seen. While the hot spot is a flaw, bear in mind that no product is perfect.

For the record

The installed lighting system discussed in February's "Home Theater" was the Lutron Grafix Eye, not the Magic I. ■

Send letters to *Feedback*, *Video Magazine*, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001; or fax to 212-947-6727; or send via CompuServe to 75147,1255, or via the Internet to 75147.1255@compuserve.com. Letters may be edited for space.

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FAST FORWARD



Tom Hanks—hits, misses and *Gump*

► Few actors are as hot as Tom Hanks. Coming off an Oscar-winning performance in *Philadelphia*, the story of a man's battle against AIDS discrimination, he stayed on top with the phenomenal success of *Forrest Gump*. But his career has had also its share of flops, like *The Burbs* and *Radio Flyer*, and debacles like *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Of *Bonfire*, an adaptation of Tom Wolfe's bestseller, Hanks recalled in an interview with *Video Magazine* that he knew at the time that "we were either making something on the order of *Gone With the Wind*, or we were the biggest clowns in the business and we'd be laughed off the screen." Ruefully, he admits "We were laughed off the screen."



Tom Hanks

Hanks attitude is always to "do the work and hope for the best." But he said he marvelled at *Gump* director Robert Zemeckis' devotion. It seemed, said Hanks, that Zemeckis knew he was creating a history-making film. Hanks worried that the film's special effects and historical trickery might overshadow the story, but Zemeckis' confidence won out in the end.

"Bob is a dynamo," says Hanks. "I will never question him again. Any actor who harbors the idea that he ever wants to direct should work with Bob Zemeckis." Does Hanks want to direct? While his career has been defined by unpredictable moves, this may not be one of them. "I really like this high-paying movie star gig, and I'd like to hold onto it as long as they'll let me."

—By Jon Silberg

THE NUMBER
4 billion
The number of prerecorded VHS movies rented each year.

CD Plus, a new disc with a CD-ROM twist

► How do you follow a monumental career as a recording engineer and producer? How about by dreaming up a new breed of multimedia CD that can play on audio CD players as a regular album, then come alive on a CD-ROM equipped PC as a sight-and-sound extravaganza with video clips, graphics, liner notes and lyrics. The disc might even serve as a computer link to the artist's or label's online service for touring info, other album previews and ticket buying.

For Albhy Galutan, computers have become his virtual life since he dreamed up and created late in 1993 a Crash Test Dummies prototype disc. Galutan has long been the chief engineer at Criteria Studios in Miami and a studio collaborator to everyone from the Bee Gees on *Saturday Night Fever* to Eric Clapton and Barbra Streisand.

Galutan's achievement has been to create the format, then sell Sony and Philips on the idea of making CD Plus an extension of their audio disc standard. "CD Plus is a hybrid of the Photo CD technology that merges still pictures, sound and indexing," explains Galutan. "The trick is in multisession recording, coding the computerized graphics and then putting liner notes in a separate sector than the audio."

Also in on the ground floor is Microsoft, which has designed its new Windows '95 operating shell to be "CD Plus-ready." All other PC users, 486SX and better, will need to install a smidgen of driver software, online or on disc.

The first CD Plus titles include Sony's two disc sight-and-sound rendering of *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits, Vol. 3* and a dressed up *Jar of Flies* EP by Alice in Chains. Atlantic, Capitol, Geffen, MCA and Warner Bros. also have enhanced titles on the way. And a near-future goal is to make the same CD Plus discs Macintosh compatible, so that a single title can be stocked in both audio and computer stores.

— Jonathan Takiff

Instant high definition

► For the right price, you can have a high-definition VCR today. It can record and play up to three hours of high-definition TV, or simultaneously record three hours of two separate S-VHS or VHS programs on high-performance metal particle videotape. Because the HDTV is recorded as an RGB baseband signal rather than a composite signal, the deck is compatible with all proposed HDTV systems, requiring only a decoder that outputs an RGB signal. The right price, by the way, is \$15,000.

The VCR is available from Captain



Captain's HD VCR

(212-307-HDTV), an HDTV company based in New York that also carries blank HDTV tapes, as well as feature films on HDTV tapes, for \$300 to \$400 each.

—Lancelot Braithwaite

Is there a Mux-Master in your future?

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The 500-channel future sounds to me like 250 channels of Betamax and 250 channels of Betamovie."

—PAUL MCGLOTHLIN
Information and Multimedia Coordinator,
Henry T. Gage Middle School
Huntington Park California

► Fiber-optic cable has always been considered the ultimate carrier of digital information. But coming services like video-on-demand may squeeze even fiber's capacity to cope with the info-gobbling demands of multimedia. To overcome this limitation, IBM Research has developed a technology that promises to create a twenty-fold increase in fiber's capacity, while slashing the cost of transmission.

IBM's MuxMaster technology, now in prototype form, makes it possible to transmit 20 simultaneous data streams—including video, text, audio and still image files—over a single fiber cable. Current technology only allows one stream at a time. IBM believes MuxMaster will find an important market among cable TV operators with video-on-demand services. "We're providing the capability to communicate large volumes of data between

computers, into a single stream for transmission over optical fiber. When the combined signal reaches its destination, the stream is separated back into its original channels. MuxMaster uses a technique called "wavelength division multiplexing" to transmit each channel at a different color of light. The technique can be compared to radio broadcasting, which simultaneously transmits signals of different frequencies without interfering with each other.

IBM officials say the breakthrough could also slice the cost of leasing fiber by 95 percent. With the current cost of renting a single fiber cable starting at \$150 per mile per month, a MuxMaster user needing a 10-channel, two-way link over 10 miles could save \$342,000 per year. And that's reason enough for anyone to consider a new technology.

—By Frank Beacham

a server site and a cable company's head end," says Aldo Mazzilli, business development manager for IBM Research.

MuxMaster essentially combines data streams from slower sources, like

TIMESHIFT TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE

Here in the U.S., the big Sony news is high-res Super Beta. But back in Japan, Sony recently devoted equal fanfare to its parallel announcement of the Video 8 camcorder. Video 8 weighs less than 5.1 lbs. with battery and tape and lists for \$1,100. It uses a CCD imager equivalent to the one in the newest CCD Betamovie. Video 8 seems to offer many consumer-friendly features not

even found in Betamovie. Sony executives won't be more specific, but say that they will "definitely" be selling Video 8 in the U.S. sometime this year...8mm is going to need an extensive library of prerecorded tape if it's really to compete with the bigger boys.

A-8 Video Movies, a California-based company, goes on the record as being the first to support the 8mm format by selling cassettes. It has released *Suzie Superstar* and *I Want to Be...BAD*, two X-rated features. Let the sellers of half-inch prerecorded tape not forget that their billion-dollar business began with people's taste for adult fare...A double-deck VCR—similar in concept to twin-deck audio recorders—has been announced by Sharp. So far, the one-speed VHS unit is built only for PAL and SECAM use and is being sold in the Mideast for \$935. A fact which seems guaranteed to anger Hollywood is the unit's ability to dub from one tape to the other. It will probably be kept away from U.S. shores for some time...The numbers are in on VHS hi-fi, and what looks gloomy for manufacturers may mean golden opportunities for shoppers. Some hi-fi models, plagued by initial quality problems and an early lack of prerecorded programming, reportedly haven't been selling very briskly. The discounting on older decks should begin shortly...Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* begins filming this month with Sara Jessica Parker and Lee Montgomery in the lead roles. Not bad for what was meant to be a one-joke video that co-starred a wrestler.



APRIL 1985



Year's Best: Recipients of Video Magazine Awards for 1994's best products, which were presented in a ceremony at the Consumer Electronics Show, include (top row, from left) Hitachi's Bruce Schoenegg, JVC's Bill Simms, Sherwood's Bob Magee, Terk's Neal Terk, StarSight Telecast's Brian Klosterman, Sherwood's Rick Jordan, Toshiba's Steve Nickerson, Sony's Craig Rathbun, Madrigal's Jon Herron; and (bottom row, from left) Mitsubishi's Howard Borsa, Pioneer's Kerry McCammon, Goldstar's Peter Suh, *Video Magazine* award presenters Jay Rosenfield and Stan Pinkwas, Intel's Jerry Braun, Videonics' Jack Aiello, Counterpoint's Laura Hendershot and NHT's Chris Byrne.

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BANG!

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RADIO MAY soon be following video's game plan. After years of satellite industry prodding, the Federal Communications Commission has voted to allocate space on the broadcast spectrum for satellites to transmit digital audio services. This could clear the way for radio stations to broadcast CD-quality music channels to homes and automobiles equipped with tiny dish-sized antennas.

convenient way to make these things interoperable." He said the first step will be to converge the worlds of video and data, but that digital storage capacity is not likely to be advanced enough for another three to seven years, according to a report in *Television Digest*. ■

HITACHI IS INTRODUCING A pair of wireless camcorders that transmit images and stereo audio via an infrared signal to an adapter that plugs into a TV. The debut is in Europe, but if the models are a hit, they'll probably turn up here. ■

THE MONTH'S CLEVEREST NEW CD-ROM isn't an exotic new game, but *Bob Dylan Interactive: Highway 61 Revisited*, a nostalgic look at the '60s from the vantage point of the '90s. Stuffed with music and memorabilia, the disc includes 10 songs, performance clips, 500 Dylan song lyrics, stills of 41 album covers, archival photos, and video anecdotes from fellow musicians, like the one about how Dylan scribbled the lyrics to "Blowin' in the Wind" on a scrap of



Digital Dylan: Folk songs and interactivity.

paper just before he sang it for the first time at Gertie's Folk City. Created by Graphix Zone and Sony Music/Columbia Records, *Dylan Interactive* is priced at \$60 and works with PCs and Macs. ■

DON'T EXPECT TO SEE SCIENTISTS achieve the much-discussed goal of technology convergence for at least several more years, according to Howard Frank, a special assistant to the director of the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency. Speaking about cable, phone and wireless networks, Frank told a recent gathering of convergence experts that "There's no

PROFESSIONAL VIDEOGRAPHERS will have a dramatically new kind of camcorder to consider after they get a look at a new disc-based model by Avid and Ikegami. The camera section, which has no moving parts, converts light gathered by a three-CCD imager into digital signals that are recorded onto a rewritable optical disc. The breakthrough model will be introduced at the upcoming annual meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters. ■

BLOCKBUSTER HAS A NEW service for deaf and hard-of-hearing customers. Video renters and purchasers can have their tapes visually checked before leaving the store to make sure the tapes have closed captions, and that they're properly displayed. Blockbuster acted after learning that more than half of deaf and hard-of-hearing video buffs report problems with captioned tapes. ■

STUDENT VIDEOGRAPHERS can earn high-end editing components and a touch of glory for their schools through a competition being sponsored by Videonics, a leading manufacturer of editing products. Competitors in the Thoughts and Dreams contest must submit a four- to five-minute video produced by students. Prizes include \$2,000 and a Videonics Editing Studio for the winning school, and Videonics components for nine additional schools. The contest is open to all U.S. middle and high schools, and the deadline for entries is May 15. For further information, call 800-338-EDIT. ■

The three most important letters in home theatre...



BETTER SOUND THAN A MOVIE THEATRE

Others are struggling to make home theatre sound almost as good as your local theatre. We've surpassed it. Others tell you how home theatre must always be done. We've customized it. We know that one size doesn't fit all. You define your needs, and we will help our dealer design a custom system based upon your personal requirements.

The heart of the American Custom Theatre is the Acurus ACT I Surround Sound Processor. When combined with high quality amplification, such as the Acurus 200X3, and the proper speakers for your listening environment, it will surpass the sound system in your local movie theatre. Now the best seat in the house, is in your house.

On-screen programming makes the ACT I as easy to use as your TV. Hand crafted in America, it has separate glass epoxy circuit boards for the three input audio section, three input video section and power supply. Utilizing 1% metal film resistors and the most advanced surround sound processing integrated circuit, the Acurus ACT I has a smooth and refined sound that surpasses processors costing several times the price. Brought to you by Mondial Designs Ltd., acclaimed in Europe, Asia and America for engineering the best value in quality audio components.

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USSB digital entertainment is breakthrough, state-of-the-art transmission of television programs in the form of digital information. The result is a sparkling, super clear picture comparable to laserdisc quality. Plus sound that's unsurpassed even by digital CDs. The effect is startling. Action scenes become more exciting, love scenes more romantic, and the landscapes will take your breath away.

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What makes it possible is the remarkable new technology from RCA called the Digital Satellite System. Because it uses the largest, most powerful communications satellite ever launched, it broadcasts up to 150 channels of perfect

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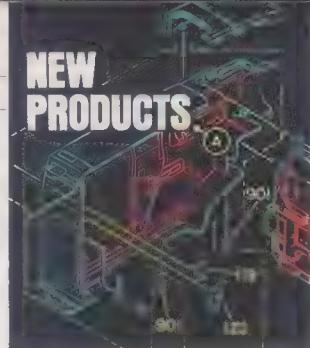
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Circle 6 on Reader Service Card.



Home theater sound, a universal VCR, a low cost combi player

SHARP VIDEO PRINTER ▶

Sharp's GZ-P15U (\$999) is a compact color video printer that connects to any video source. It can print images with 16.7 million colors in a variety of formats. A stabilization function takes jitter out of still frames, while a high-speed strobe print function helps you catch your tennis swing in a succession of images. Digital image processing improves color, edge rendering and noise reduction. Print paper is also available in pre-printed postcards or self-adhesive labels. (For more info, circle 107 on your Reader Service Card)



SMALL BUT SOLID ▼

Rock Solid Sounds' HCM 1 two-way compact speaker (\$199) employs Acoustic Voice Matching to maximize flexibility and ensure accuracy within your listening environment. Though small in size, Rock Solid Sounds says the HCM 1 can handle 150 watts and still offer musical accuracy, speed and definition, with a response range from 60 Hertz to 22 kilohertz (-6 dB). It comes in three- and five-unit clusters suitable for home theaters. (For more info, circle 102 on your Reader Service Card)



WORLDWIDE VIDEO ▶

Samsung's SV-300W Worldwide VCR (\$1,999) makes the world smaller for multi-cultural videophiles by domesticating foreign transmission formats like PAL and SECAM. This four-head, hi-fi VCR can copy, record and play any TV broadcast format, regardless of where you find yourself. It has a multi-source AC power input that's compatible with 100- to 240-volt sources. (For more info, circle 101 on your Reader Service Card)

◀THEATER IN A BOX

Magnavox's MX931 Home Audio Theater Package (\$499) offers a one-brand, one-box answer to home cinema sound. Simply unload it and hook up any hi-fi VCR and a TV and you're ready to go with a five-speaker Dolby Pro-Logic surround system. The MX931 provides 50 watts per channel to the front speakers, and 10 to the center and the rears. Magnavox says the package includes installation instructions, color-coded wires and an 800 number for set-up questions. (For more info, circle 108 on your Reader Service Card)



◀COLORFUL AND EFFICIENT

Quasar's new VM555 camcorder (\$649) is a VHS-C point-and-shoot camcorder that offers a color viewfinder, a 12x four-speed zoom and a sliding lens cover. Zoom ratio, battery life and tape remaining indicators are visible in the viewfinder. For those

who forgot to bring along enough batteries, Quasar says it has achieved a 20 percent increase in power efficiency. (For more info, circle 111 on your Reader Service Card)



Give Us Your Best Shot



For eleven years, **Visions of U.S.** has discovered a wealth of new creative talent in the premiere video contest of our time. This year it's your turn to create an original video production and have your work judged by video professionals—with the chance to win valuable Sony prizes. The contest, sponsored by Sony and administered by the American Film Institute, is an invitation to express your vision on 8mm, VHS or Beta. Just choose a category—fiction, non-fiction, music video, experimental or young people—and start shooting. Submit your work by June 15, 1995 and a distinguished panel of judges including Tim Allen, Francis Ford Coppola, Kathleen Kennedy, LeVar Burton, Penelope Spheeris, Scott Wolf and Henry Thomas will begin the judging process. You'll be in competition for an exciting selection of Sony video products and everyone who enters will receive a bonus blank videocassette. To find out more, call (213) 856-7787. Or write **Visions of U.S.**, P.O. Box 200, Hollywood, California 90078.

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◀ Good Vibrations

Aura's IC-US Interactor Cushion (\$99) promises to rock your world. Lean back against the cushion, connect its power amplifier to the audio output of almost any A/V receiver, TV, VCR or game system and Aura says you will feel as if you are inside the action. The cushion converts bass sounds into vibrations. Adjustable controls enable you to find your favorite level. (For more info, circle 110 on your Reader Service Card)



◀ TERK ANTENNA

Terk Technologies' TV15 indoor TV antenna (\$39) provides an elegant, functional solution to TV

reception problems. Designed by an expert in radar and communications technologies, the compact TV15 brings in TV broadcasts from channels 2 to 83 with its "advanced frequency matching technology." Terk adds Pin-Dot pre-tuning, which reduces ghosts and artifacts in difficult reception conditions. A selector lets you switch between off-air reception and other sources. (For more info, circle 105 on your Reader Service Card)

SPEAKER MOUNTS ▶

OmniMount Systems' Universal Mounting Kits (\$59, pictured, and \$79) give you the ability to mount speakers almost anywhere. The kits wed steel support arms to a high-strength polymer ball and socket, and are designed for speakers up to either 8 or 15 pounds. They allow attachment to any wall, ceiling, deck or floor, regardless of the surface material. Nuts and bolts are included, along with a hex wrench, a drill bit and detailed instructions. (For more info, circle 104 on your Reader Service Card)

WHO'S AT THE DOOR? ▼

Vivitar's SMS-4 Video Door Phone (\$597) is a video intercom you can use to screen your visitors without opening the door. The two-part security device installs easily by adapting existing doorbell wiring. A sensitive, wide-angle lens and a two-way condenser-type microphone is secured in a weatherproof housing. The four-inch, black-and-white monitor provides one-way video. Up to four monitors can be connected to the system. (For more info, circle 109 on your Reader Service Card)





With Cinema DSP, you'll be amazed at what comes out of the woodwork.

Bats screech overhead. Wolves howl in the distance. And footsteps crunch across your living room floor.

No, it's not your imagination. You're hearing sounds placed around the room, just as the director intended.

All courtesy of Yamaha Cinema DSP. The home theater technology that gives dialogue more definition. Music, more dimension. And sound effects, more graphic detail.

Only Yamaha Cinema DSP creates phantom speakers that fully replicate the experience you get in multi-speaker movie theaters. It sounds so real, in fact, you'll swear you hear sounds in places you don't even have speakers.

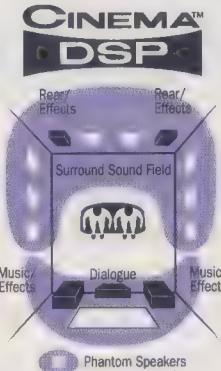
As you might imagine, a breakthrough like this is no small feat. It's accomplished by multiplying the effects of Digital Sound Field Processing and Dolby Pro Logic.®

Digital Sound Field Processing is Yamaha's unique technology that electronically recreates some of the finest performance spaces in the world. And Dolby Pro Logic is the technology responsible for placing sound around the room, matching the dialogue and sound effects with the action on the screen.

Together, these two technologies allow Yamaha to offer a complete line of home theater components that outperform other comparatively priced products on the market.

Stop by your local Yamaha dealer for what could be a very eerie demonstration. Maybe we can't talk you into a system, but that doesn't mean we can't scare you into one.

For the sales location nearest you, call 1-800-4YAMAHA.



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Circle 7 on Reader Service Card.

A 35-inch Zenith TV premieres StarSight's onscreen guide

Amid all the talk about hundreds of channels and video-on-demand, it's easy to lose track of the fact that many people feel they have enough trouble managing the channels they already receive. As any savvy *Video Magazine* reader knows, America is littered with flashing 12:00 displays, complicated remotes and missed timeshifts. For people with these problems, it's "never mind the fancy stuff." But what about an onscreen TV guide with a foolproof recording capability? StarSight, a software service by StarSight Telecast that's been introduced first by Zenith, is just that.

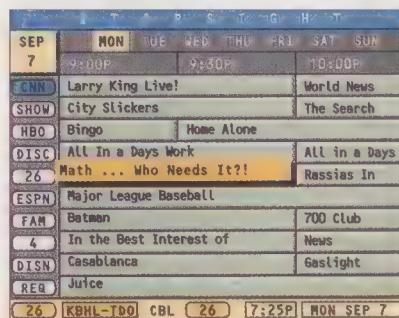
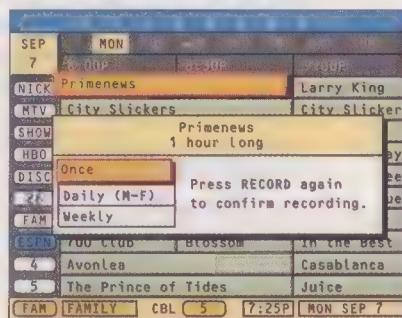
We checked out StarSight on Zenith's new 35-inch SM-3589BT8 TV. It's the first component to carry the guide, although it will soon be used in TVs, VCRs, TVCRs and stand-alone set-top boxes by many manufacturers. The Zenith monitor itself had a very nice picture, with good blacks and vivid colors. But the remote control was what was really interesting about the TV. It's simply laid out, feels great in the hand and features a few buttons you've never seen before, for StarSight navigation.

You get StarSight by pressing one button and following the onscreen instructions. Unlike most onscreen menus, StarSight wisely chooses black type on lighter backgrounds for almost all its operations. It means having to cover up the TV picture with graphics, but it's much easier to read.

Setting up the StarSight service involves connecting your cable, VCR and TV, and then calling an 800 number to sign up. You get a free month for



Star Power:
Zenith's 35-inch TV with a sampling of StarSight menus showing program listings, by channel or call letters, and record information.



\$1,999 RATING: ★★★★

signing on. After that, StarSight costs \$4.99 a month, about the same as you'd pay for four issues of *TV Guide*. A wire runs from the back of the TV to any point in the sight line of the VCR's infrared remote window. It's an emitter that turns the VCR on and off for StarSight-activated recording. When you have StarSight, your VCR has to be off when you're not using it. For example, if you were to fall asleep while watching a VHS movie and set StarSight to record a late-night program, you wouldn't get it. For some videophiles, this may be one more thing to remember. But for everyone else, it's one blessed thing to forget. StarSight

tries to shield users from making mistakes.

The first thing we got after setting up the system and tuning in some TV channels was a StarSight box informing us that *Masters of the Universe* had six minutes left. It's great to know a show's name and the time remaining when you land on a commercial. There was also a reading of the station and the time of day. A second screen, accessible with one button, gave us more information: the year of the show, the category of program, a plot summary, and a notice of any violence and language. It was really easy and informative, but since we'd only been online with StarSight for a few minutes, we didn't yet have everything we wanted to see. Before you can really use it, StarSight takes a while to "download" into your TV, which has to be off during the process. This means overnight for most folks. If, for any reason you have to have the TV on all day and night, you can't use StarSight.

After two hours, we turned the set back on and found everything up—a week's worth of StarSight's onscreen TV guide. The main menu guide screen shows what's on while you're watching, plus and minus a half hour. To see what's on later or what you missed earlier, you use arrow keys on the remote to shift a screen cursor back and forth in the day, or to other days in the week. Again, it's really simple. To change the show that you're watching, you simply scroll up and down among the program choices and hit enter when you see

continued on page 41

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Video's next generation—10-gigabyte movie CDs

Without a shot being fired, a looming, behind-the-scenes battle over competing formats for a digital video disc (DVD) appears to have come to an end. The likely winner is a high-density CD developed by Toshiba and Time Warner, and backed by several of the world's top technology and entertainment companies. The prize: lead position in the billion-dollar race to develop the next big movie and entertainment medium.

The Toshiba/Time Warner DVD can hold a staggering 10 gigabytes of digital data, with 5 Gb on each of two sides. That's enough capacity for two 135-minute movies with digital surround sound, multiple language tracks and subtitles; room enough for one 4.5-hour disc to hold all of *Gone With the Wind* or *The Godfather* with space to spare. In music terms, it's 15 times the capacity of a standard CD. It's also the equivalent of 6,900 computer floppy discs, or a stack of paper documents twice as high as the Empire State Building.

is being supported by Matsushita, parent company to Panasonic, Technics, Quasar and MCA; Thomson Consumer Electronics, parent to RCA, GE and ProScan; Nippon Columbia, parent to Denon; as well as Hitachi, Pioneer, JVC, Mitsubishi, MGM/UA and Turner Home Entertainment.

To the eye, the Toshiba/Time Warner DVD resembles a conventional CD. However, to get double-sided play capability, the disc is formed by bonding two 0.6mm-thick five-inch discs back to back. The process is similar to that now used to manufacture laserdisks. The DVD format

with or without letterboxing. Other features include Dolby AC-3 (5.1 channels) surround audio, and a parental lock-out capability. The DVD players will be compatible with current audio CDs.

The DVD format has capabilities beyond movies. It can be used in computer-related applications as a server for sup-



Movie Machine: Ten-gigabyte movie CD proposed by Toshiba and Time Warner, flanked by prototype player and widescreen TV.

The new format, incompatible with a similar CD configuration proposed by Sony and Philips, became the instant frontrunner as an industry standard when Sony announced it would study the specifications of its competitor. "Our aim has been to achieve a single standard in this area, and we still believe in the advantages of a single format," said Rick Clancy, Sony vice president of corporate communications.

Asked if Sony might abandon its DVD and join the companies backing the Toshiba/Time Warner format, Clancy said "it's not so black and white." Sony, said Clancy, first saw specifications for the competing format the day it was announced. "We are not being arbitrary," he said. "It will be scrutinized by our engineers." Sony plans to resolve the issue this year. "Our goal is to work this out so we will be in a position to introduce a product sometime next year," said Clancy.

The Toshiba/Time Warner DVD is expected to be introduced in 1996. It

uses variable MPEG-2 digital image compression technology. It allows a peak data transfer rate of 10 megabits per second and can sustain an average transfer rate of 4.94 megabits per second for the full 135 minutes available on each side. Video and audio quality, said Philip Kent, president of Turner Home Entertainment, are "far superior" to any existing home video format.

The Toshiba/Time Warner format can accommodate up to eight languages and 32 sets of subtitles on a single disc. This allows producers to put several language versions on a disc, reducing mastering and inventory costs and making it easier to market the same disc in many countries at the same time.

Viewers will be able to select either a dubbed, subtitled or original language version of a film, all of which can be contained on the same disc. They will also be able to select the aspect ratio of their choice, whether it's a conventional 4:3 screen or 16:9 widescreen,

plying programs to networks for digital transmission, and as a high-capacity CD-ROM that supports full-motion video in multimedia programs. As a music platform, the format could be used for longer playing, higher fidelity versions of conventional CDs. It can also support high-definition TV, when blue laser technology becomes available.

"Don't think of the DVD simply as a glorified videocassette with superior pic-

continued on page 42



The Player: Prototype Sony digital video disc player with 3.7-gigabyte disc from Sony and Philips.

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PV-M1

Calibration, the ultimate tweak for your TV.

Calibrating your TV monitor to meet the color temperature specifications set by the National Television Standards Committee (NTSC) can improve your set's picture. Earlier "Home Theater" columns explained how you can do some of this yourself (June '94), and when it's appropriate to get the help of a technician (Oct. '94). One reason sets vary so much from the NTSC standard and from each other, is that they're fighting for consumers' attention on the sales floor. Manufacturers believe, with good reason, that TVs that appear brighter and hotter get looked at first and longer by more people. But the factory settings used to make sets sizzle in stores aren't the ones that work best for watching movies at home, which is why calibration helps.

It may interest readers to know more about the differences we've seen among TV sets as they arrive from the factory, about the sets we've found that are able to be calibrated, and about which sets are best at tracking a gray scale. Not all consumer or, for that matter, professional monitors can be properly calibrated. However, the picture is improving. Today, far more manufacturers build their sets with this capability.

Color temperature is measured in degrees Kelvin, and gray has a particular color in the NTSC television system. It is defined as 6,500 degrees Kelvin or D6500 near the black body curve on the chromaticity diagram of the Commission Internationale d'Eclairage. The diagram shows the relationship of colors to a neutral gray, and their corresponding temperatures. This temperature was chosen because it's at a point that combines red, green and blue to create a "daylight" gray. Using this as a neutral point allows the maximum degree of color fidelity. Because manufacturers have been waging a brightness war to attract attention on the sales floor, TVs are factory-set to color temperatures ranging from 9,500 to 16,000 degrees Kelvin (the upper limit of readability by the Philips color analyzer, a professional measuring tool) and beyond. It's also

why TVs from different manufacturers placed side by side in a showroom never display the same degree of color saturation.

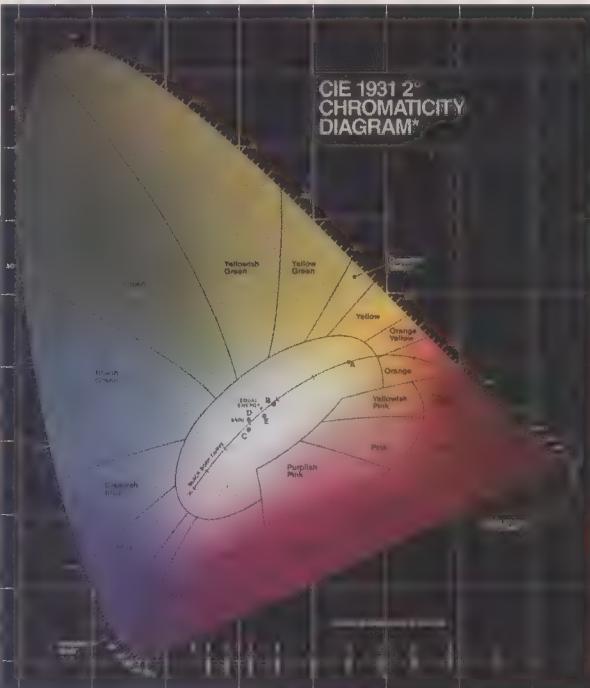
If you look at the accompanying diagram, you'll see the higher temperatures are well into the blue side of the scale. This means that the neutral gray start-

ing point is very blue. This limits a monitor's ability to produce accurately all the other colors in the spectrum. This is particularly noticeable on black-and-white pictures, which tend to exhibit a green haze. On color images, scenes with lots of white will look blue/white, and skin tones will appear bluish or greenish. (No, it's not a Martian, it's the way your TV has been set.)

It follows that if you adjust your monitor to the broadcast standard of 6,500 degrees Kelvin, the set will more accurately reproduce incoming broadcast signals. You will be seeing a truer representation of what broadcast engineers work so hard to deliver. In the case of a movie that originated on film, you will be viewing a closer approximation of what the cinematographer and director intended you to see. Another benefit of a properly calibrated set is that colors look more consistent from channel to channel on regular television or cable. Channel-to-channel consistency can be further improved if your set has defeatable auto color and auto tint features.

The good news for consumers is that more TV manufacturers are including internal controls that allow their sets to be adjusted to 6,500 degrees. For example, three years ago, only Toshiba's most expensive TV was capable of being set to the standard and to track a gray scale. Today, several Toshiba TVs—including the 32-inch CN32D90, the 35-inch CX35C60 and CN35D90 sets (see "Videotests," this issue), the 55-inch TP55D80 rear projector and the 56-inch widescreen set—can be calibrated with a color analyzer by accessing the service menu through the remote control.

This is an easier, better way to access the controls for gain, which adjust the upper end of the gray scale (also known as drive) and bias, the lower end of the gray scale (also known as screen), than on any other sets we've encountered. When we looked at the CN32D90 ("Videotests," Feb.), we noted the color temperature arrived



Taking Temperatures: The CIE diagram shows how red, green and blue combine to form a neutral 6,500-degree gray. Toshiba's 16:9 TV (below) is one of a growing number that can be calibrated to this NTSC standard.



from the factory at 9,100 degrees Kelvin. After calibration, the set was 6,600 degrees and tracking a gray scale almost flawlessly. The only other TV manufacturer that lets you calibrate its sets without going inside them is Thomson Consumer Electronics. Its RCA and ProScan sets have the gain and bias controls for red, green and blue on the rear panel.

In the course of calibrating monitors, we have found factory settings that range from 7,500 degrees Kelvin for a Sony PVM 2530 professional monitor to beyond the 16,000-degree upper limit of the Philips analyzer. This reinforces the old adage that NTSC stands for Never Twice the Same Color. The award for the best factory setting goes to Runcor International. Its 750 video projector comes from the factory well converged with a color temperature very close to 6,500 degrees. This greatly reduces set-up time and expense.

Other sets we've encountered that calibrate well include Mitsubishi's 35-inch CS3515R, 40-inch CS40FX-1 and VS-1250 data-grade front projector, Pioneer's Pro-97 and Pro-107 rear projectors, Sony's VPH-1252Q data-grade front projector, NEC's 6PG data-grade projector, Hitachi's Ultravision rear projectors, Thomson's 35-inch PS35653 and widescreen PS34190 ProScan sets, Proton's 27-inch VT-296 TV, and Magnavox's 27-inch TP2790.

Professional projectors and monitors come with factory settings close to the NTSC standard. However, consumer sets are delivered with their color temperatures set extremely blue, and overdriven in their contrast range, which means they're running beyond optimum capability. The Pioneer Pro-97 50-inch rear projection set clocked in at a very blue temperature of 11,500 degrees on the bottom of the gray scale, 12,000 in the middle, and 11,000 at the top of the scale. After calibration, it was able to track the gray scale nearly perfectly, with a temperature of 6,500 degrees on the bottom of the scale, 6,500 at the top, and between 5,800 degrees and 6,500 in between the top and bottom of the scale. This is quite acceptable, especially considering that most sets won't track a gray scale perfectly from top to bottom anyway. A few hundred degrees of temperature variation in either direction is not as critical as it may sound.

We also tested a ProScan PS35653 35-inch direct-view console that merits mention. It comes set on the blue side of the scale with a color temperature measuring well over 10,000 degrees from top to bottom. However, the set is most impressive in overall gray scale tracking. It can be set to track the gray scale flawlessly at 6,500 degrees from

top to bottom. In addition, all the calibration controls are on the rear panel, eliminating the need for an installer to go inside the set. These details make it one of our favorite TVs.

Once you've watched movies on a properly calibrated monitor, and seen what NTSC pictures can and should look like, it can be difficult to go back. It is still not possible to see this difference in stores while shopping for a TV. But I hope that before long you will be

able to visit your local retailer and do an A/B comparison of a factory set monitor and an identical set calibrated to the NTSC standard. Then you'll be able to judge for yourself.

Kevin Miller is a founding member of the Imaging Science Foundation, which is working to make TV calibration more available. If you are considering a TV and would like to know if it can be calibrated, call the Foundation at 407-997-9073.

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What type of video editor are you? Four personal ways to make the cut.

I've worked as a freelance video editor for 10 years under the direction of hundreds of directors and producers, cutting everything from documentaries and art videos to traditional dramas. Piecing together other people's ideas, I found myself analyzing the videomakers I edited for and the different approaches they used. It helped that many directors really liked to talk. I discovered in the course of this work that there seems to be four distinct editing "personalities" among videomakers.

Of course, many of the people I work for are not editors at all. Generally, they don't know how editing components work. Some have never been in a studio situation before. But that doesn't stop them from being able to tell editors what their videos need. And the way they do this tends to fall into broad patterns. Whether you find yourself in a studio situation someday, or continue to do your own editing at home, you may find it helpful to understand the fundamental ways in which the videomakers I've worked with approach the process of editing.

STORYTELLERS

Storytellers are very likable people. They come from an unbelievable variety

of backgrounds. They arrive on time at the edit suite, but talk to everyone in sight, so they might as well be late. Their main interest is telling a good story, and they hate special effects. They haven't the slightest idea what the editor is doing, but have no difficulty putting a tape in a VCR. They think primarily in terms of characters and stories, rather than about how scenes look. From a photographic perspective, all their action tends to be centered in the frame. Rather than try to express irony through editing, they play with irony through characters and situations. They're not only smooth talkers, they're smooth operators. They talk so much I feel like I never get anything done. But storytellers don't seem to care.

Storytellers are most likely to become famous. After all, everybody loves a good story. However, storytellers make bad music videos, their editing sessions cost twice as much as they should, and they sometimes make editors feel like they've been hired just to lend an ear.

WRITERS

Writers generally arrive late, then discover they forgot to bring their videotapes. A coffee break ensues. Most come from a literary background—poetry, philosophy, film theory and the

like—and are inclined to say things other people don't understand. Writers have a tendency to do quirky things with their hands or mouths. They focus intently and intelligently on the video screen, but have to be helped putting a videotape in the VCR.

Writers think a video is a book or, sometimes, a poem. They're incredibly well organized, yet startlingly absent-minded. When they finally get all their tapes together in the edit suite, they expect the editor to create the visual equivalent of a T.S. Eliot poem. They love special effects, particularly when the effects don't work very well. They think the resulting mess is "neat."

However, writers are apt to come up with some of the most interesting editing ideas imaginable. As a result, they make editors feel that they're doing something really important. On the other hand, writers often drive editors crazy, forcing them to assume impossibly contorted positions on their switchers to achieve the effects they're after. Finally, writers often make "one-of-a-kind" masterpieces, which audiences consider odd, and which frequently never get seen.

VISUAL THINKERS

Visual thinkers often occupy influential positions in the media world. Either they work in the industry (in film, video, computer graphics, advertising etc.), or the tape they're working on is going to get them a job in the industry. Often they come from a background in photography, painting or design. They blow into the edit suite like Hitchcock onto a set.

For visual thinkers, video editing is the laborious process of getting what's in their heads onto tape. They know how the electronic tools, digital gizmos and color-correcting gadgets are supposed to work, but sometimes get bogged down in techno-babble. They think primarily in terms of images, color, framing, shape and juxtaposition. They often view the screen as an electronic canvas. They play around a lot with the

continued on page 43

Dennis Day is an award-winning video artist working in Toronto.

Your technical queries answered

Q I recently had some water damage to my videotape cabinet and the bottom two shelves of tapes are covered with mildew. There is even mildew inside the shell of the cassettes. Is there any way of removing the mildew sufficiently so that I can at least dub the damaged tapes. At least five of them are irreplaceable! John A. Brown, II
Waynesville, North Carolina

A Your mildewed tapes can be cleaned, if not by yourself, then perhaps by someone else with the time, patience and special tools needed for the task. Some years ago, a reader sent me a photograph of a gadget he had built just for this task. It allowed him to mount a cassette on a wooden jig, pull out the tape and run it through a chamois pad dampened with film cleaner. The tape is run through at slow speed, using either a slow speed motor attached to the hubs, or by hand cranking. Other readers have reported similar results by modifying older VCRs, utilizing just their tape drives, or by adapting inexpensive tape rewinds. One company that makes a jig that can be used to repair tapes is Multi-Video of Charlotte, North Carolina. It costs about \$125, so you may want to try building your own jig first.

Cleaning the interior of the shells can also be time consuming. If they're extensively gummed up, it's probably better to transfer the reels to a brand new shell, ditching the blank tape inside. If the reels themselves are mildewed, consider transferring the tape itself, after cleaning, to two brand new reels and a new cassette housing. Few of these alternatives are easy for most consumers, and shouldn't be undertaken lightly, lest you make matters worse. Since I'm not aware of any services that specifically cater to the repair of flood damaged or mildewed tapes, anyone offering this sort of service is welcome to write, and I'll pass the information along when it arrives.

Q My wife wants to buy and store, unopened, "collector sets" of pre-recorded tapes. I say that these tapes

won't hold up over a long time and that a better investment would be laserdisc versions of these movies. What do you think?

Richard Remmelle
Ft. Meyers, Florida

A Given a choice between VHS tapes and laserdisc versions of the same titles, I think that an investment in laserdisc sets would be more rewarding in the long run. Most collectors agree that a good laserdisc pressing of a new title will outlast videotape versions. However, pressing defects can still occur, and new titles should be opened and played to determine if a defect is present while it can still be exchanged with the dealer.

If your wife is motivated by an aesthetic appreciation of the movies she is collecting, then laserdiscs provide better audio and video quality than tape. But even if she is hoping that the value of these titles may increase as years pass, my thinking is that the laserdiscs will still have more value than tape, simply because fewer laserdiscs are pressed for a given title than tapes. Due to the increased difficulty in re-pressing some titles, based on supply and demand, some early laserdisc releases have already appreciated in value, although marginally.

Be aware though that newer formats are always looming on the horizon. Right now we are just a year or so away from the arrival of the digital video cassette recorder as well as a new CD-sized digital video disc system that may offer video quality rivaling or surpassing laserdiscs. Should these formats become established, especially the digital video disc, you can expect to see all the major studios re-release most of their best titles in this new format. And if digital video discs become as successful as CDs, then within a decade, both VHS and laserdiscs may be fading formats. So don't expect to get rich by sitting on "unopened" copies of movies you may have collected in these two formats. ■

Address questions to Q&A, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001; fax questions to 212-947-6727; or send questions via CompuServe to 75147,1255 or the Internet to 75147.1255@compuserve.com. Questions may be edited for space.

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From its inception, The Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio has been in the business of recognizing excellence. Every other year, including this year in Los Angeles, the Academy holds its Golden Note Awards banquet, during which awards are given in the following categories:

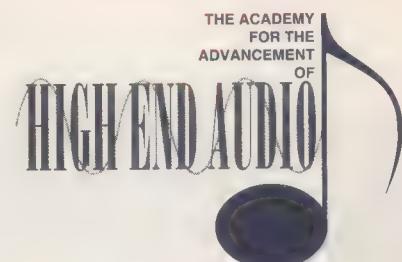
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Best Original Recording
Best New Company
Most Innovative Technology

Nominees for each category are chosen by a truly international panel of respected audio journalists. The winners are chosen by the voting of the Academy's General Members.

Regular readers should "watch this space," as the winners will be announced later this year. To be sure, the winners in each category are truly representative of "the best" our industry has to offer.

The envelope, please...

**Chris Browder, B&W Loudspeakers,
President of the Academy for the
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VIDEOTESTS



MITSUBISHI FRONT PROJECTOR

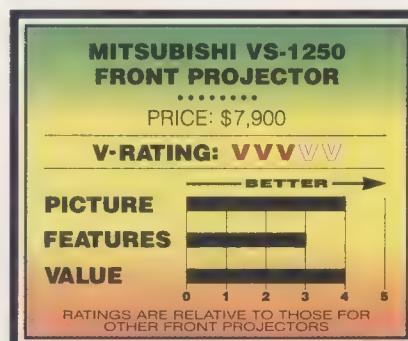
By Peter Barry

When you're ready for the full cinema treatment in your home, that can mean only one thing: a front projection system.

Front projection systems, which are two-piece set-ups because they require a separate projection screen, offer the largest picture available to consumers. With set-up options that include image sizes from 70 to 120 inches, these monitors deliver the big picture.

Mitsubishi's VS-1250 is a multi-speed, data-grade projector. Data-grade means it meets the detail specifications for the computer industry, which requires greater image accuracy than video grade projectors. Multi-speed refers to the ability to scan at a rate higher than the NTSC broadcast standard of 15.75 kilohertz. In this case, the scan rate is 31.5 kHz, a speed that allows the projector to be used for computer graphics as well as with a line doubler. At its \$7,900 suggested price, the VS-1250 can be considered an entry level data-grade monitor. Data grade projectors go up to about \$20,000 in price.

The projector comes already set up



for a 100-inch picture and a tabletop mount. Of course, it can be configured in other ways, such as with a ceiling mount or hidden in drop panels, but the

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Brand & Model: Mitsubishi VS-1250

Price: \$7,900

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 114.5 pounds, 12-5/8 x 23-5/8 x 26-1/2 inches

Power Consumption: 300 Watts

Screen Size: factory set for 100 inches

diagonal, may be adjusted for sizes from 70 to 120 inches

Aspect Ratio: 4:3

Tuner: none

Remote Control: intended to be used with a wired external controller or line doubler (see accompanying Dwin Videotest)

Inputs: RGB+S from 5 BNC connectors or 25-pin sub D connector,

100-inch diagonal image is generally considered the size at which these machines can maintain optimal picture brightness. Even the best projectors are severely tested at larger picture sizes.

The VS-1250 is strictly a video monitor. It has no tuner for pulling in TV stations, nor adjustments for color and tint. In the past, these controls would be found on a separate video controller. In this case, however, Mitsubishi has decided not to offer the video controller. Instead, it recommends use of a line doubler, a recommendation likely to become more common in the world of front projection. This is smart for two reasons. First, a good line doubler can significantly

manually switchable, power connector

External Speaker Connectors: none

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: none

Accessories: power cord, adjustment tool (in control compartment)

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): video 61.1 (calculated), chroma AM 65.8 (calculated), chroma PM 65.3 (estimated); note—line doubled pictures are not measurable with our standard NTSC equipment

Screen Brightness: 7.43 footlamberts from factory, 12.75 after calibration

Color Temperature: 16,000 degrees Kelvin from factory, 6,600 after calibration

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: over 400 lines

improve the picture. Second, the standard price of the video controller is about \$3,000, while the Dwin LD-2 line doubler and A/V control center that we used, which essentially includes a controller, is priced at \$3,500 (see accompanying "Videotest"). So, in this instance, we got the controller plus a line doubler for only a few dollars more than the cost of a controller.

Setting up a front projector is not a task to undertake yourself. You will likely only be able to purchase this projector through a home theater installer, and he will bring it in and set it up. Ask your dealer at the outset to detail his installation experience; you will have to live with the company's abilities. We asked Mike Levy of Total Media Systems to set up and calibrate the VS-1250. We were shooting the image at a 100-inch diagonal Da-Lite Model C screen with a gain of 1.0. This is a good reference screen with no hot-spotting.

Our first step was placement. Since we were not setting up a permanent installation, we put the projector on a floor mount. Our screen was against the wall and 27-inches off the floor. This dictated that we place the projector at a height of 20-inches off the floor and 120-inches away for a perfect fit with the screen. The Mitsubishi came from the factory with this type of set-up intended. If you are considering another kind of set-up, Mitsubishi will configure it for you before shipping.

This particular projector had not been aligned before shipping, so adjust-

continued on page 38

DWIN LINE DOUBLER AND A/V CONTROL CENTER

By Peter Barry

The Dwin LD-2 line doubler by Dwin Electronics is an interesting component to review in that it cannot be looked at on its own. Yet we know what a scan line looks like, and we are familiar with the artifacts line doublers can introduce. A line doubler that introduces too many artifacts during the doubling process can be worse than no line doubler at all. And, in fact, for a number of years, less expensive doublers were more problematic than curative. We are happy to report that line-doubler technology has come a long way since and that you don't have to buy a \$15,000 Faroudja LD100 to experience its benefits (though more power to you if you can, as it is still the industry reference).

The LD-2 serves a number of roles



SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Brand & Model: Dwin System LD-2

Price: \$3,500

Weight & Size (h/w/d):
10.8 pounds, 3-1/2 x 17 x 12-3/4 inches

Power Consumption:
65 Watts

Remote Control: Allegro MBC 500PL programmable IR wireless

Inputs: RGB+S (9-pin D), S-video (two 4-pin mini-DIN), video (four RCA jacks), stereo audio (seven L&R RCA jack pairs), power

Outputs: RGB+S (separate BNCs), fixed and variable

stereo audio (L&R pairs, RCA jacks), 12 VDC screen control (2.5mm dual concentric)

Accessories: wireless remote control

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution:
over 400 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB):
unweighted luminance 61.3 at S-video out, video 61.8 at video out, chroma AM 66.8 at video out, chroma PM 67.1 at video out

Audio Frequency Response: 10 Hz-20 kHz, +0.1/-0.4 dB

Audio S/N: 92 dB

Total Harmonic Distortion: 0.02%

in a projection system. It acts as a digital NTSC converter, digitizing the composite or S-video output signal from a laserdisc player, or surround processor/preamp. Then it line-doubles the signal and decodes it into an analog RGB+S signal, which consists of separate signals for red, green and blue information plus a fourth signal called Sync. Sync is used to re-integrate the separate signals at the projector in proper time alignment.

After the LD-2 has digitized the signal, it is line-doubled, or put through the Motion Adaptive Line Interpolation Circuit. Now the NTSC broadcast standard utilizes a horizontal scanning

continued on page 39





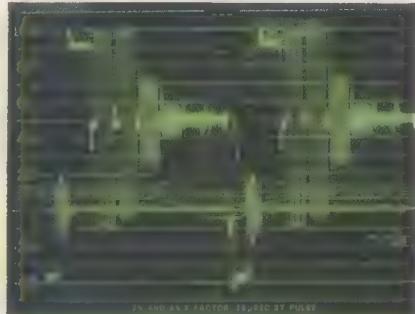
AIWA MULTISTANDARD VCR



By Brent Butterworth

Aiwa took the video world by surprise two years ago with its \$600 M360 VCR, the first affordable multistandard deck. The M360 could play tapes recorded in the PAL video standard used in many foreign countries, including most of Western Europe, on the NTSC TVs we use in North America. It could also play NTSC tapes on a PAL TV. You could connect a PAL or NTSC VCR to its output, convert a tape and record in the second VCR's tape format.

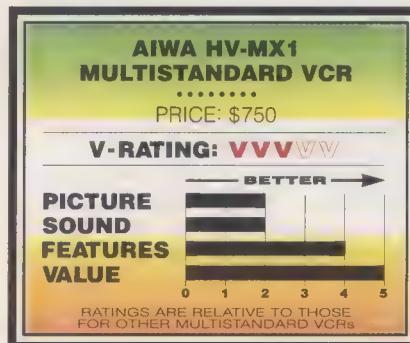
However, the M360 could only convert standards on playback. It couldn't record an NTSC signal in PAL format,



Aiwa multiburst shows little energy in the higher bars, indicating less than average resolution.

or a PAL signal in NTSC format. Thus, it offered no way for North Americans to make PAL tapes for relatives in Europe, except by buying a second M360 or a PAL VCR to use as the PAL recorder.

The \$750 HV-MX1 solves this problem by incorporating two standards



converters. With the HV-MX1, you can record an NTSC tape of a PAL signal, or a PAL tape of an NTSC signal. As with the M360, you can also watch either kind of tape on a PAL or NTSC TV. It incorporates an NTSC tuner, too, so you can record TV shows in PAL or NTSC.

It also records, plays and converts the MESECAM format, a version of the SECAM system used in France. It won't

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Brand & Model: Aiwa HV-MX1

Price: \$750

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 11 pounds; 3 x 15 x 14-3/8 inches

Power Use: 100-240 VAC, 23 Watts

Jacks: front-video and audio; rear-video in & out, audio in & out, RF in & out

Tape Format & Speeds: PAL/MESECAM/NTSC 3.58 VHS; record-PAL SP/LP, NTSC SP/EP; play-

PAL SP/LP, NTSC SP/LP/EP

Video/FE Heads: 4/0

Cue & Review Search: 4x non-locking; 6x locking; variable NTSC/PAL; variable MESECAM

Visible FF And Rew: no

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 4-1/4 min for T-120 tape

Remote Control: IR wireless

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: index with auto/manual mark, manual erase, and search

Audio: linear-mono; hi-fi

convert a PAL or NTSC signal to MESECAM, but it will let you watch a SECAM or MESECAM tape on an NTSC or PAL TV, and record the signal on an NTSC or PAL VCR, and record NTSC and PAL signals in MESECAM and SECAM. (Conversion of SECAM or MESECAM to NTSC results in a black-and-white picture.)

The HV-MX1 is perfect for those who have relatives or friends abroad. You can watch their tapes on your TV, and send them tapes they can watch on their PAL TV and VCR. You can also send them tapes of American TV shows. The deck is great for corporations with international divisions or customers, and for wedding videographers who need to provide PAL tapes for some clients.

Aiwa limited the four-head deck to monaural sound because the methods used to record NTSC and PAL hi-fi differ greatly. Adding multistandard hi-fi would have dramatically increased the

AFM: none

Titles/Graphics: none/OSD in English/Spanish/German

Preset Method: auto program plus manual add/erase

Cable Tuning Range: 2 to 13, 4A, A-5 to A-1, A to W, W+1 to W+84

Timer: 6-program/1-month

Key Features: multi-format use, still frame, frame advance, slow motion

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 200-220 lines NTSC; 200-230 lines PAL/MESECAM

CAM

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video NTSC 45.5 SP, 41.0 EP, PAL-NTSC 38.4; weighted video NTSC 51.5 SP, 47.4 EP, PAL-NTSC 47.1; chroma AM NTSC 45.3 SP, 40.9 EP, PAL-NTSC 43.4; chroma PM NTSC 45.8 SP, 41.4 EP, PAL-NTSC 48.5

Audio Frequency Response (-3 dB): NTSC SP 50 Hz-11 kHz; NTSC EP 75 Hz-4 kHz; PAL SP 75 Hz-10 kHz

Linear Audio S/N: 44 dB

Audio Distortion: 3% at start; 1.1% after about 5 min.

price of the deck. Because the HV-MX1 has no hi-fi sound or flying erase head, it's useful chiefly for standards conversion and casual viewing. Installing it in a home theater system or video editing suite is asking for disappointment.

The deck has a conventional set of playback controls on the front, with intuitive, standard selection buttons. Buttons to select NTSC or PAL recording sit to the left of the cassette hatch. The NTSC/PAL playback selectors sit to the right of the hatch. You select MESECAM recording and playback through the onscreen menu system. The deck automatically senses which standard is on a tape, and which standard is coming in on the input. The one thing I don't like in terms of ergonomics is a door that covers the cassette hatch and the eject button. It doesn't improve the deck's appearance, and there's no easy way to remove it.

The back panel has a single set of video and mono audio inputs and outputs, plus conventional antenna jacks. The remote control is also conventional. However, the deck works with any power standard, from 100 to 240 volts, and at 50 or 60 Hertz.

To test the HV-MX1, I recorded NTSC signals in both NTSC and PAL formats and watched them on a JVC professional NTSC monitor. I also watched a PAL tape recorded in Italy. I monitored the sound with Grado SR-80 headphones.

As a tool for inexpensive standards conversion, the HV-MX1 does a great job. It will give you a watchable picture no matter how you convert the signal. However, forget any high-falutin' videophile quality standards you might have, because converting a video from one format to another almost always results in significant picture degradation. You get strange-looking motion artifacts when converting NTSC's 30 frames per second to PAL and SECAM's 25 frames, and vice-versa, plus the extensive digital processing required creates artifacts of its own.

Videos converted within the HV-MX1 suffer from low horizontal resolution, digital artifacts, including horizontal lines that jump up and down, and aliasing, which creates stair-stepped edges on diagonals and curves. Still, the HV-MX1 is a remarkable achievement for a suggested price of \$750. Its converted videos look almost as good as the foreign music videos, professionally converted from PAL, that I like to watch on New York City cable TV.

In straight NTSC recording and playback, the HV-MX1 performs like a typical low-cost VCR. Horizontal resolution is so-so, cutting down the picture detail noticeably compared to a top VHS VCR.



Basic Remote:
Aiwa's remote carries conventional VCR controls. Standard-converting controls are on the deck.

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TECH TIP

High and dry

I always carry rain protection for my camcorder when I'm taping outdoors. Specifically, I carry a large, neatly-folded freezer bag with a Ziplock top. I may get soaked, but the camcorder stays dry.

Bob Law

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



TV Twofer: Toshiba's 35-inch set comes with a full-featured remote and one with basic features only.

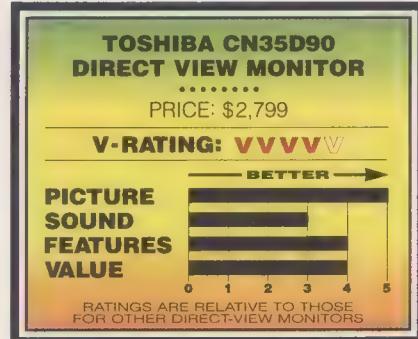


TOSHIBA 35-INCH CINEMA SERIES TV

By Kevin Miller

Senior editor Peter Barry recently gave Toshiba's 32-inch CN32D90 Cinema Series set high marks for picture quality ("Videotests," Feb.). You might infer then, that Toshiba's 35-inch entry would score high as well. This, however, is not always a given when jumping from the 31- or 32-inch size to the 35-inch model. While a 3- or 4-inch increase in tube size may seem a simple leap, manufacturers often have trouble getting their 35-inch sets to perform as well. In Toshiba's case, the CN35D90 certainly lives up to its smaller cousin's visual attributes.

Out of the box, factory settings were on the high side of their range, a typical situation. At first look, the set was extremely oversaturated, which was not surprising considering the color was set at the maximum position. Each adjustment, with the exceptions of sharpness and tint, was set too high. Tint was at about one quarter on the graphic; it needed to be raised slightly. Contrast was set at the three-quarter mark, and had to be lowered. Brightness was also at about the three-quarters mark on the graphic, which raised black level to a point where deep blacks were absent or light gray in appearance. Try watching a



SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Brand & Model: Toshiba CN35D90

Price: \$2,799

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 175.7 pounds, 30-3/4 x 36-5/8 x 25-5/8 inches

Power Consumption: 283 Watts, average

Screen Size: 35 inches diagonal

Aspect Ratio: 4x3

Speaker Size: main L&R 2 x 5 inches each; subwoofer-one 4-inch round; surround (separate cabinets) two 5-inch round

Type of Tuning: frequen-

cy synthesis

Method of Tuning: programmable scan on set; scan plus direct access on remote

Broadcast Tuning Range: 2 to 13, 14 to 69

Cable Tuning Range: 125 channels-2 to 13, A-8 to A-1, A to I, J to W, AA to ZZ, AAA, BBB, 65 to 94 and 100 to 125

Remote Control: two: EZ IR wireless remote and main IR wireless

Outputs: video and fixed level stereo, variable level stereo, PIP audio, antenna 1 loop through, speakers

Headphone Jack: none

External Speaker Connectors: front left

film like *Blade Runner* with the brightness too high and you're likely to miss many subtleties. Using A Video Standard test laserdisc from Reference Recordings, I discovered the set has superb gray scale delineation, indicating a good power supply.

The feature I most applaud Toshiba for is its three color temperature settings: cool, medium and warm. The cool setting measured a very blue 12,300 degrees Kelvin on my Philips color analyzer, a professional device

Screen Brightness: 40 footlamberts from factory, 16.5 after calibration

Color Temperature: 9,350 degrees Kelvin pre-calibration on medium setting, 6,500 K post-calibration on medium

Accuracy of Colors: very good/excellent

Audio Frequency Response: stereo line out-20 Hz-20 kHz, +0.3/-1.8 dB, front speaker out terminals-20 Hz-20 kHz, +0.2/-3.3 dB, rear speaker terminals-variable with DSP setting

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 420

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): video 53.9, chroma AM 63.1, chroma PM 62.3

Audio S/N: line-76.7 dB; speakers-64.7 dB

Total Harmonic Distortion: line 0.4%; speaker-1.3%

designed for this task. The reading had a peak light output of 40 footlamberts, which is about 10 footlamberts too high. The medium setting measured 9,350 degrees Kelvin, while the warm setting measured 7,200 degrees, which is very close to the industry standard of 6,500 degrees Kelvin. In fact, I have not measured any consumer TV that came so close out of the box.

It's great to have these temperature-setting options, especially if you don't have access to professional calibration (not all installers are equipped to calibrate TVs). If you do have access, the settings can be an outstanding viewing enhancement. Consider: You could ask your installer to use the high setting to keep the set's picture the way it came from the factory. The medium temperature can be set for home theater viewing by having it professionally calibrated to 6,500 degrees Kelvin for accurate color rendition on videos. And if you are a real cinemaphile, the warm setting can be adjusted to 5,400 degrees, which is the standard color temperature for film. This setting will give you the unique pleasure of watching black-and-white movies the way they were intended to be seen. If you have a laserdisc collection with a wealth of good old black-and-white classics, you'll see them like you've never seen them before on video.

Toshiba is one of the few consumer TV makers that also gives installers the ability to calibrate the set from the remote control. This saves a lot of time and hassle. Once you know the procedure, calibration, which can be tricky and time-consuming, becomes a piece of cake. I dialed in the color temperature on the top of the gray scale to 6,510 degrees, achieving 16.5 footlamberts of light. This is excellent for this size screen. My reference ProScan PS3112Z 31-inch monitor gives me 16 footlamberts. The bottom, low-output IRE window measured 6,450 degrees Kelvin after calibration. As with most direct-view sets that can be calibrated, all the signal windows in between fell into place beautifully at or near 6,500 K. I calibrated the set to 5,400 K on the warm setting, the film industry's reference temperature for white, and to 6,500 degrees for the medium setting.

Watching *Schindler's List* at the 5,400 degree setting showed a marked improvement over the way the film looks on monitors calibrated to 6,500 degrees. At this setting, if you look closely, you can see slight greenish tones. This is not the case at 5,400 degrees. This is pretty tweaky, but it's something for film buffs to consider.

This set, like Toshiba's CN32D90, uses Toshiba's FST Perfect SuperTube. It certainly appears very flat, not an easy

achievement when you're working with a tube this big. The set also boasts Toshiba's Cyclone subwoofer system, which actually created a sense of bass. It even has a volume control specifically for bass, like separate powered subwoofers. I am not easily impressed by TV audio systems, preferring instead an outboard set-up for uses other than casual viewing. This one surprised me. I found the audio fairly engrossing. I listened to the left and right speakers with the Cyclone subwoofer system on the CAV boxed laserdisc set of *Star Wars*, *Schindler's List*, and *Take 5*, a Sony test laserdisc.

There's one feature on this set, which is also on sets by other manufacturers, that I would recommend against using if accurate color is important to you. It's a Flesh Tone correction circuit, designed to compensate for variations in flesh tones when changing channels. The circuit makes flesh tones look more normal relative to the factory setting's boosted reds. My advice would be to leave the circuit off, and back off the color setting with the remote.

The CN35D90's factory-set color, brightness and contrast levels start out too high. But after adjusting the front panel controls with the help of *A Video Standard*, the set produced a spectacular picture in every regard, except for the bluish color of white. After eliminating the blues with the color analyzer, all the colors were vivid, smooth and accurate. The detail level on this 35-inch is also extremely high, with a reading of 420 horizontal and 450 vertical lines. I also loved watching black-and-white material after setting the warm color temperature to 5,400 degrees Kelvin. This is a great capability. All this and decent sound with external rear speakers included adds up to a monster value on this monster-sized direct-view set. Bottom line: I'd gladly own this one, and I don't say this often. ■

TECH TIP

Sepia secrets

If you're shooting black-and-white photographs with a camcorder and want to make them look old and sepia-toned, light them with a regular light bulb or a studio light and set the white balance adjustment to the outdoor setting. You can also white balance while holding a blue gel filter in front of the lens. The darker the blue of the gel, the more sepia-toned your photos will look.

Joe Faria
San Geronimo, California

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SAMSUNG VHS CAMCORDER

By Stewart Applegath

786
Despite the dominance in the marketplace of compact VHS-C and 8mm camcorders, with and without LCD viewscreens, full-size VHS models remain popular. Samsung has just introduced the SCF754, one of two new VHS camcorders it offers. This format has particular appeal to those who value ease and practicality. It is stable, comfortable to shoot with, offers two-hour SP recording time, and you can play back the tapes on any VHS VCR without a cassette adapter and without having to hook up the camcorder.



Samsung multiburst pattern shows signal output in the fourth bar, indicating good detail for VHS.

The SCF754 provides a practical package of features for the very low price of \$599. Included are 12x zoom capability, manual shutter control, a two-hour battery, a versatile focus

mechanism and a flying-erase head. While some VHS models offer more extensive capabilities—with such features as color viewfinders, digital effects or zooms and built-in lights—they do so at a significantly higher cost.

The SCF754 isn't shaped to fit your shoulder, but it sits comfortably and securely nevertheless. There aren't many buttons to worry about and it is easy to operate them by feel. Because of its size and configuration, you can see most of the control legends while you're shooting, a pleasant change from many of the small camcorders we see. The viewfinder is adjustable and extends far enough from camcorder's body so that you can use either eye comfortably. There is a diopter focus control, brightness, and a further fine focus adjust-

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Brand & Model: Samsung SCF754

Price: \$599

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 5.3 pounds; 8-3/8 x 3-7/8 x 15-7/8 inches

Power Use: 12 VDC, 10.5 Watts

Image Sensor: 1/4-inch CCD

Lens: F1.8; 12x (5.4-64.8 mm) power zoom with macro at WA

Filter Diameter: 52mm

Minimum Focusing Distance: WA 1 inch; tele 2 inches

Auto Focus: TTL, switchable to manual with buttons for near, far and one-shot AF

Iris: auto only

Auto Fade: to black, hold-down type, about 4 secs.

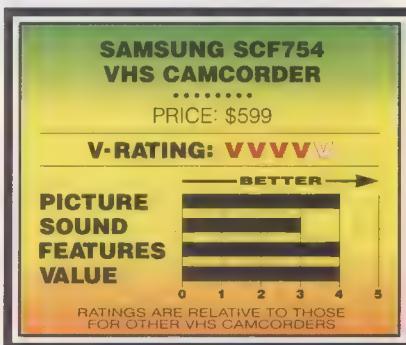
Shutter Speed (sec.): normal (1/60), 1/100, 1/250, 1/1000, 1/2000, 1/4000

White Balance: auto switchable to indoor or outdoor

Viewfinder: black-and-white electronic

Viewfinder Controls: diopter focus, brightness, electrical focus

Microphone: mono electret condenser



ment on the bottom of the viewfinder.

The focus is controlled by a mode switch that gives you the option of auto and manual focus, or a combination of the two. The focus mechanism also allows automatic macro down to a dis-

Jacks: video in/out, audio in/out, DC out 2-hour battery

Tape Format & Speeds: VHS; SP

Video/FE Heads: 2/1

Cue & Review Search: 3x

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: less than 6 min. for T-120

Remote Control: none

Audio: linear-mono; hi-fi AFM-none

Titles/Graphics: 2-line, 16-character, 1-page/OSD

Timer: self timer; time lapse

Key Features: still frame, frame advance, audio dub, video dub, insert edit, manual focus, 44.3 dB

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: camera-280 lines; recorder-240 lines; EVF-330 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video 48.2, weighted video 52.1, chroma AM 46.4, chroma PM 45.1

Approx. Battery Life (man. focus/no zoom): 125 min.

Audio Frequency Response: 75 Hz-11.5 kHz, +1.5/-3.0 dB

Linear Audio S/N: 44.3 dB

Audio Distortion: 1.3%

tance of one inch. In manual mode, two buttons on the top front of the camcorder control the focus mechanism: one moves the focus in one direction, the other button moves it in the opposite direction. The buttons did the job a bit slowly, but with a manual, motor-driven system, it's better that the mechanism moves slowly when you're seeking a fine focus. The push-auto button is much faster and gives you the best of both worlds: manual focus with a quick resort to automatic focus. The auto focus worked quite well, if a bit slowly. However the delay is offset by the fact that it didn't have to hunt.

Samsung has provided a manual white balance control, which works when the camcorder is in manual mode. It has two settings: one for incandescent light and one for outdoor light. There is also a manual shutter speed control button, with settings ranging from 1/60 second up to 1/4,000 second.

The SCF754's other features include a titler with 32 character spaces, (16 per line), an automatic exposure system and a record review function that allows you to check the last few seconds of just-recorded tape. The fader (to black) is straightforward;

it works as long as the button is pressed.

The camcorder's self-timer gives you a 10-second delay to get into the action and will record either 30 seconds or the remainder of the tape. There is also time-lapse recording (at one second intervals, every minute) and an animation capability. The clock select and set buttons serve as the tracking adjustment buttons in playback mode.

The SCF754 offers a good package of editing-friendly features, such as video dub, which replaces video but keeps the audio, and audio dub, which keeps the video and replaces the audio. Samsung has included a flying erase head, so you don't have to worry about the rainbow glitches at the joints between video segments. With the still frame, frame advance and titling functions, beginners or casual users can do most of the basic editing they'll need to do, without buying a more sophisticated editing VCR.

The AC unit doubles as a battery charger and the connecting cable plugs in beside the RCA input/output jacks. Battery life is long: it is rated at two hours and that's about what we got.

We're glad that RCA audio/video inputs and outputs have been included.

Not only can you plug the camcorder into a TV or VCR to play back your tapes, but you can also record from other sources. The SCF754 doesn't offer microphone or headphone jacks, hi-fi stereo or manual aperture control, but these are not unusual omissions at this price level.

The rocker mechanism that controlled the zoom lens moved more slowly than I would have liked. Its slowness was an impediment when I wanted to zoom in, get an accurate manual focus, then zoom out again. Even for general shooting, a slightly faster zoom or a manual zoom lever would be an improvement.

The SCF754's picture is quite good. It's not the best we've seen in a VHS camcorder, and there was a bit of chroma noise, but it is \$300 less than most others we've tested. Overall, the camcorder delivered very respectable performance. Sound quality was perhaps a notch below picture quality, and there's no mic input, but audio frequency response and distortion were average, and there was very little noise leakage from the transport and zoom motors.

This camcorder may not have all the features videophiles look for, but if

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you're looking for a solid starter camcorder with the great convenience and stability VHS offers, Samsung's SCF754 is a good choice at a low price.

FRONT PROJECTOR

continued from page 31

ments were made to the vertical height and the tilt position. Keystone adjustments were also made to get the top of the picture equal in width to the bottom.

The focus out of the box was very good. Typically, front projectors display a good picture straight from the box, requiring only that the installer fine tune it. Once we had it running, we put on the test laserdisc *A Video Standard* by Reference Recordings and checked the critical parameters.

Using the crosshatch pattern, white horizontal and vertical lines intersecting on a black background, we could see that the image was square to the screen. We noted a slight bend in the vertical lines just below the intersections. It is the power supply's duty to maintain straight lines. The slight bend could indicate ringing around objects, but no such ringing was visible on laserdisc images. On a convergence pattern, the red, green and blue lines overlapped exactly to make the white lines. Because we were line-doubled with the Dwin, we were able to see two distinct lines on the red and green convergence pattern when we adjusted the focus, which is pretty impressive.

The VS-1250's line amplifier, evaluated on the multiburst pattern, showed itself to be very extended and linear, which means that picture detail was delivered cleanly, well out to 4.2 megaHertz. The 100 IRE window, a white rectangle on a black background, is the best reference for picture brightness and color temperature because it delivers the highest light output.

Here it held its shape, with no colored edges or asymmetries. This tells us the power supply was not being overwhelmed by the contrast level. Using a Philips color analyzer, we read a color temperature of 16,000 degrees Kelvin, which is extremely blue, and a footLambert measurement of 7.43, which, while acceptable, could be better. Bear in mind that brightness at the projection distance is a key factor in overall picture quality.

While observing the IRE window, Levy was able to adjust the 1250's contrast (inside the set) up to a level of 12.75 footLamberts, which is as good as we've seen in front projectors. By watching the 100 IRE window, the con-

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trast could be optimized within the set's linear operating range. The added white level, or contrast, is a huge factor in the final picture you see on the screen (even the screen contributes to preserving that precious light).

Once we had gotten plenty of footLamberts, we needed to bring the color temperature down from the very blue 16,000 degrees to 6,500 Kelvin, the NTSC standard, so that colors could be set against a proper reference point. After the usual back-and-forth process that calibration entails, the VS-1250's color temperature was brought down to 6,600 degrees Kelvin in the 100 IRE window, with a boost to 8,000 degrees in the middle windows (where the light output is lower), and 6,600 degrees again in the lowest output windows.

Why did we see an 8,000 degree peak? Because most video projectors don't have a gamma correction circuit that tames such peaks, although it is present in the Pioneer Elite series of rear-projectors. This calibration achieved a huge improvement in color rendition, and the gray scale was right on. Color accuracy was very good.

We also found that Mitsubishi has improved its power supply in this product

compared to projection models the company showed a year and a half ago. Resolution was better than 400 lines both horizontally and vertically. (Despite manufacturer specifications, 440 lines of resolution is the maximum that's obtainable today.)

The VS-1250 gets its good picture from three seven-inch CRT guns. They are well made with nine-element glass lenses. Each lens incorporates a color correcting filter that helps maintain the color purity in the individual red, green and blue guns. They help refine the colors you see.

Once the set-up was complete, we put on some of our favorite laserdisks for a real-world look. The discs included *Batman Returns*, *The Piano* and *Speed*. When the colors are right and the picture is of this quality, your viewing experience is raised to a new level. The subtleties of detail that were revealed within the expanse of a 100-inch screen drew us into the movies in a way few smaller set-ups can equal.

In all, Mitsubishi's VS-1250 projector delivers a big image with very good brightness and color rendition for its price. Coupled with the Dwin line doubler as its controller, the 1250 offers an

excellent film-like experience. ■

For more information: Mitsubishi, 800-779-1775; Reference Recordings, 800-336-8866; Total Media Systems, 516-777-7058.

LINE DOUBLER

continued from page 31

frequency of 15.75 kiloHertz per second. This number comes from multiplying 525 lines by 30 (for every 1/30 of a second). The scanning method is called interlacing: Two 263-line "fields" are laid on top of one another so that the spaces of the second field cover the lines of the first. This helps to fill the spaces between lines. Two fields create one full frame every 1/30 of a second.

The line doubler takes the original two fields and digitizes them. It holds them and compares them for motion differences (interpolates them), then creates a single field which it scans at 1/60 of a second. This scanning is done progressively, as in computers: the lines are drawn sequentially from top to bottom. Because the doubler does this at 1/60

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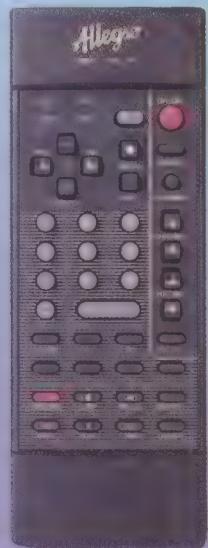
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of a second, in 1/30 of a second it scans twice as many fields as would be scanned without the doubler. If you take a screen image's original 525 lines and multiply by 60, you get 31,500, or the scanning frequency of 31.5 kHz. This creates a more film-like image. Monitors that have the ability to scan at 31.5 kHz are known as multispeed monitors.

The LD-2 also serves as a switcher for seven inputs, including four composite video sources, two S-video and one RGB source. An onscreen menu shows input selection and video controls for contrast, brightness, color, tint, sharpness and video noise reduction, as well as horizontal picture centering. There are also bass, treble, balance and volume controls for audio, and all are accessible via an infrared multibrand wireless remote. You can choose different settings for each video input and store them in memory; they will be recalled each time the input is selected. Or you can choose three "personal preference" video settings that can be stored and recalled for any input except RGB.

We hooked the Dwin into our system via the Video 1 input with a composite signal output from the Proceed PAV decoder/preamp, and an RGB+S signal

Double Time:
The Allegro remote lets you command the LD-2's A/V controller features.



running out to the Mitsubishi VS-1250 front projector (see first "Videotest"). The adjustment parameters for contrast and the other controls offer 63 notches of adjustment. The Dwin comes from the factory set at 31 across the board. Once the projector was calibrated and set-up was complete, we returned to our test disc, *A Video Standard*, for final tweaking. Settings remained at 31 except for sharpness, which we brought down to 11 to reduce edge enhancement. We have found these settings need to be customized for the surround sound processor being used, as video loops vary.

The picture, after we completed our adjustments, looked really good. The effect of filling in the spaces between scan lines gives the image a somewhat softer focus, but the overall effect is preferable by a good margin to the scan lines that would otherwise be visible. The best part of the image was that there were virtually no artifacts from the digital doubling process, even on scenes with a lot of motion. The line doubler had truly improved image quality. Scan lines in a picture usually harm the movie illusion by limiting depth perception; the lines themselves remind you there is a flat surface. By reducing the presence of these lines, faces and objects take on a more three-dimensional perspective. What you get is a smooth image with a touch of softness. On the best laserdiscs, the picture looks spectacular. On lower quality discs, video noise becomes more apparent, but the bottom line is that the picture has been dramatically improved over straight projection and the drawbacks are negligible. After living with a well-doubled system for a while, it would be very difficult to return to a non-line-doubled image.

The LD-2 is compatible with data-

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grade projectors from every major company. The fact that line doublers are being recommended to purchasers of the Mitsubishi VS-1250 reviewed here, as well as to purchasers of other major brands of projector, is a real benefit to those ready for a dedicated home theater. If you pair the VS-1250 with Dwin's LD-2, you will not be disappointed.

Dwin Electronics can be contacted at 612 Luton Drive, Glendale CA 91206; 818-956-1608.

HANDS ON

continued from page 22

something you want to watch.

If you can't decide what to watch, you can press a "theme" button, which lists program choices by category: movies, specials, sports, children's, and so on. This is one cool system. You can decide what you're in the mood for, and StarSight will tell you what's on while you're watching and what's coming up later in the week. If you see something you want to record, now or later in the week, the procedure is remarkably simple. Just highlight what you want to record on the onscreen guide and press a record button.

There's been a lot of progress made in the quest for the holy grail of point-and-shoot VCR recording. Much credit should go to Gemstar and its VCR Plus system. But StarSight is the easiest system to use that I've seen, despite the sophistication of the technology that makes it work. The combination of clear graphics and minimal button-pressing makes timeshift recording seem effortless. Shows that are currently being recorded are shaded red in the menu guide, and shows you've scheduled to be recorded get a small red marker to remind you of your plans. By pressing a "to do" button, you can review and edit a list of single, daily or weekly programs that you have decided to tape. And with the SM3589BT8's picture-in-picture capability, you can record one show while watching another, with an assist from the VCR's tuner.

StarSight isn't the first onscreen menu system that's caught our eye. RCA deserves kudos for the onscreen guide for its Digital Satellite System. But StarSight's a humane and seemingly bullet-proof system that you can use with your existing cable or antenna TV. And it doesn't cost any more than TV Guide. I call this a bargain, and an unqualified success.

TECH TIP

Musical batteries

Nothing is more frustrating than having your camcorder batteries die when you're miles from an electrical outlet, and when you have to get those shots of the pyramids! However, it may be possible to salvage the situation. Put your "dead" batteries in a warm pocket or, temporarily, in the sun. Turn off all auto modes on your camcorder, and prepare to focus and zoom manually. Now try using the battery that first ran out of juice. It will probably have recovered enough to run the camcorder for up to a minute. Try any other batteries that you may have in turn, and repeat the process. It's a nuisance changing batteries every 30 seconds, but this technique can eke out enough residual power to help you snare get those once-in-a-lifetime shots.

James R.C. Adams
North Manchester, Indiana



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SPECIAL REPORT

continued from page 24

ture and sound," said Gerald M. Levin, Time Warner's chairman and CEO. "Think of it, instead, as a very powerful, cost-efficient storage device that can dramatically enhance multimedia applications, bringing to them, for the first time, high-quality, real-time, full-motion video."

Indeed, the Toshiba/Time Warner DVD appears to meet the key goals of the Hollywood Digital Video Disc Advisory Group, a panel of entertainment industry executives created to identify essential elements the next home entertainment format would need from the industry's point of view, and to head off format wars over competing standards. The group recommended a carrier capable of holding a full-length film at a quality better than current tape and laserdisc systems. It also specified surround sound, multiple language and aspect-ratio capability, as well as parental lockout and the ability to employ an unspecified copy protection system.

The Sony/Philips format, which was

previewed at the Consumer Electronics Show (see "Digital Fever, Vegas Style," this issue) held a few weeks before the Toshiba/Time Warner announcement, also meets the advisory group's recommendations. It would store 3.7 Gb of data on a single sided disc. This translates to about 135 minutes of MPEG-II quality video together with multiple tracks of compressed digital audio and subtitling.

For greater capacity, the Sony and Philips specification includes a version that will be able to accommodate 7.4 Gb on two layers of a single substrate, or recording medium. This enhancement is being developed together with 3M.

COST AND YIELD

In a white paper on their format, Sony and Philips argued their single-layer design is superior because it eliminates "various production problems associated with laminated (two layer) discs, including the need for additional molding, sputtering and coating stages; longer production cycles; layer separations due to poor bonding and lower manufacturing yield rates." Sony and Philips also argued that a single substrate design avoids the complex and expensive servo mechanisms and optical pickups that players for laminated discs have traditionally required.

As a result, they say, their design can be manufactured with only minor modification at dozens of existing CD facilities around the world, and produced at a cost similar to that for conventional CDs.

Toshiba and Time Warner say that their double-sided discs can also be mass produced on existing equipment, with slight modifications, at costs that are competitive with other high-density optical discs.

NEW WAY TO WATCH

Because it's fully digital, the DVD could also lead to a new way for consumers to purchase motion pictures and other entertainment software. For example, since the cost of manufacturing a five-inch CD is less than a dollar, movie studios could choose to virtually give away the DVD, but charge consumers for an electronic "key" that would regulate access to the disc. "When a movie is new, the studio might charge \$5 for a key that allows a single viewing. When the movie gets a little older, the charge might be \$3 for a viewing. At a certain date there might be a \$5 charge for an infinite viewing key," said Andy Lippman, assistant director of the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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quential in this scenario. What you are doing is distributing only a license key and charging only for the key." Though the first generation of digital video disc players will not use this encryption technique, Lippman said the sponsoring manufacturers have discussed the possibility of including encryption features and an enabling "smart card" on second-generation DVD players.

Regardless of such matters, DVD is on a fast track to the marketplace. Expect to hear more about this emerging technology.

CAMCORNER

continued from page 28

edges of the frame rather than work to keep everything centered. They're not so much interested in the story as how to tell it. Visual thinkers never "make things up" in the edit suite. Everything is worked out in advance. They dream in video.

Visual thinkers also tend to make lots of money and great music videos. However, they don't usually tell good stories, since they're more interested in what actors are wearing than in what they're saying.

ILLUSTRATORS

Illustrators generally need a vacation. Other than this, they're hard to pin down. They come from all walks of life and approach everything with a mild degree of interest. They always arrive on time. Not surprisingly, illustrators generally use video to illustrate ideas, usually someone else's. To them video is like creating a slide show with sound, or holding a conversation with pictures.

There is a direct relationship between what they want to say and the images they use to say it. They have a fundamental understanding of how most electronic things work, especially clocks. They're out of the edit suite at five o'clock sharp. Illustrators fuel the industrial video side of the industry, and make all those business conventions more exciting. They also help editors pay the rent.

Which type of videomaker do I like working with most? The truth is, all of them. In fact, some of the most brilliant videos I've been privileged to fade-up on defy categorization. Incorporating many different approaches, they elude me just when I think I have them figured out. As in the real world, the broader your experience and the more comprehensively you approach the editing of videos, the more likely it is your ideas will succeed.

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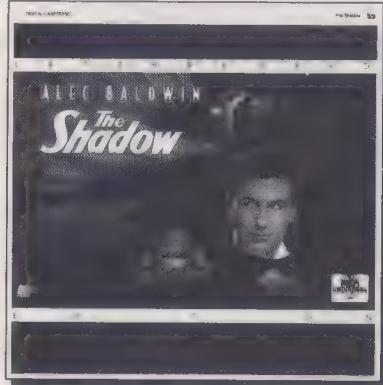
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EDITED BY JOSEF KREBS

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I am looking for the 1988 *Saturday Night Live* episode that featured Mel Gibson as host. I am also looking for a copy of his 1980 movie *Attack Force 2*. If anyone can help I'll send a blank VHS tape along with postage. April Fairchild

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Vincent Price and Peter Lorre made two hilarious spoofs of the horror flick genre back in the '60s. The first was *The Raven*, of which I have a videotape copy, but I don't even know the name of the other. Price played a man who inherited his father's funeral home. Peter Lorre played his assistant. To make a living, they had to murder people to drum up business. If someone out there has this

movie or knows where I can get a decent VHS copy, please contact me.

Raiford L. Pittman
Attorneys at Law
208 South Main Street
Box 216
Sardis, MI 38666

I am looking for a good copy in either VHS or Beta of the movie *Red Planet Mars* (1952) with Peter Graves and Andrea King. I also need *The Rains Came* (1939) with Myrna Loy and Tyrone Power, *Arabian Nights* (1942) in Technicolor, and *Titanic*, with Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck. Will reimburse any reasonable expenses.

David A. McClintock
1454 Sheridan Avenue, N.E.
Warren, OH 44483

My wife has threatened to leave me if I can't manage to obtain the tape of *Howard Keel in Concert in London*. I am more than happy to pay any costs as I love my wife. (I also enjoyed watching the concert in the past.)

D. H. Stoddard
6854 Shorecrest Court
Fort Worth TX 76132
Phone: 817-292-1198

I am looking for a copy of a TV movie called *An Inconvenient Woman* (1991) taken from the book by Dominick Dunne. It stars Jason Robards and Jill Eikenberry. It was originally shown in two parts with a total running time of 200 minutes. I will pay any reasonable expenses for a good VHS copy.

Terri Pierce
45 Andora Circle
Droville, CA 95966

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SMALL DISH MANIA

*How DSS
is bringing
digital sizzle
to satellite
television.*

Has there ever been a runaway consumer electronics success story to match that of the Digital Satellite System, a.k.a. DSS? Consider the competition. In the first year home VCRs became available, Sony moved 30,000 of its beloved Betamaxes. Two years later, when VHS VCRs appeared, about 120,000 were sold. With CDs, we remember first-year sales of 35,000 players. (And oh, how the masses fumed about their kingly \$800 to \$1,200 prices.) Big-screen TVs? A respectable crowd of 115,000 hauled them home during their first year.

Yet that's chump change next to the sales figures rolling up for DSS, the first high-powered, all digital, direct-broadcast satellite system to be realized in the U.S.; for that matter, the world if you underline the digital part. As a higher-tech compact alternative to cable, DSS' 18-inch dish, stylish receiver, high picture and sound quality, and massive array of programs represent a system who's time hasn't just arrived, but exploded.

Just seven months after its small-town debut, and two as a nationally available product, this brainchild of GM



Satellite Suite: RCA's DSS dish, receiver, access card and remote control.

Hughes Electronics/DirecTV, Thomson Consumer Electronics and Hubbard's United States Satellite Broadcasting had already bested combined first-year sales figures for VCRs, CD players and big TVs. At year's end, almost 350,000 of the dishes were already perching on American rooftops, while another 240,000 were on the way to dealers still crying over Christmas sales lost for lack of enough DSS systems to meet a demand that exceeded Thomson's most optimistic projections. Thomson, sole maker of the receivers for now, has said the backlog will continue into Spring, even though its factory in Juarez can produce 100,000 receivers a month, and will soon expand to 150,000.

C-band satellite TV has been available to backyard America since the 1970s. And the medium-powered Primestar satellite system, which is financed by the nation's biggest cable concerns, has been brewing for four years. But DSS is a product unto itself. It's the first to fully and elegantly fill the description of direct broadcast satellite. Its KU-band signals, high-power rating and prime orbital positions make possi-

ble good reception anywhere in the continental U.S. with a pizza-sized dish that fits where larger satellite antennas cannot—physically, legally or esthetically. And it does so at a \$699 and up price tag for DSS hardware, plus fees of \$7.95 to \$65 for monthly program packages.

DSS' use of digital signal coding is also potent, because it guarantees the delivery of robust, ghost-free video signals in huge numbers (more than 150 channels beam down from two adjacent "birds") with high-quality surround sound. And after pointing the dish in the right direction (south), operation of the system is virtually goof proof. All a user has to do is land the cursor of the DSS onscreen program guide on a pleasing show title and tap a button.

Representing 15 years of effort and an investment in excess of \$1 billion, DSS could turn a profit for major stockholder GM Hughes Electronics as soon as the middle of next year, when the system expects to have three million subscribers, says Hughes/DirecTV executive Eddy Hartenstein. Much of this has

come at the expense of the cable industry, which has taken to calling DSS "Deathstar" and is re-tooling Primestar as a more potent competitor (see sidebar).

"More than 50 percent of our subscribers have cable passing by their front door, but chose us instead," notes USSB's Steve Blum. And that's saying something, since DSS, unlike cable, can't supply you with local over-the-air channels or, for that matter, network affiliates from any TV market if you already have decent local reception. "That's not a big deal," says Blum. "Eighty percent of the country can pick up local channels perfectly well with a rooftop antenna or rabbit ears. Other people are combining DSS with a lowest cost 'lifeline' cable service."

With more manufacturers coming online soon, and more avenues being explored for DSS sales, the baby dishes may soon be as ubiquitous as rooftop antennas were in the pre-cable TV era. Sony, the system's second supplier, is allowed to begin selling DSS products only after a million RCA units are in the sales pipeline. Sony expects that day to come on or about June 1. "Production has already begun in our Mexico facility," allows company exec James Palumbo, who plans to plant Sony's DSS with a few thousand dealers, do serious consumer educating with fancy in-store displays, and promote the "unique styling and features" of Sony brand systems. While stressing value, ease of use and multiroom capability, Palumbo says Sony won't compete on price or volume with RCA, which may cut \$100 off its system prices for this

year's Christmas season.

Just in case RCA and Sony can't meet the demand, two or three more suppliers will get into the biz in early 1996. Likely candidates include Matsushita's Panasonic brand, Toshiba, Goldstar, Uniden and maybe Hughes itself.

DSS sales crews are also just starting

like new, and making people realize they have something as a source input that's worthy enough to drive a big screen."

Finally, says Hartenstein, "there's just an overwhelming amount of choice in terms of what you want to watch." Between the two service suppliers, you can buy 43 off-network ("cable") chan-



Two-Way Play: Digital decoder for OpenTV system developed by Thomson and Sun Microsystems holds potential for interactive services on DSS.

to test their appeal to apartment dwellers and commercial establishments. Faster than you can say "make mine a double," DirecTV envisions signing up some 400,000 bars and restaurants for one of six different program packages priced from \$175 to \$29,999 per year, depending on the channels and the size of the establishment.

Factor in the price erosion that's sure to come in the next few years for DSS (even though demand is expected to stay high), and estimates by market analysts that 10 million DSS systems will be installed by the end of the decade don't seem far fetched. Still, the question remains: why has DSS taken off so much faster than other home electronics products that have turned out to be huge hits? "A couple reasons," suggests Hartenstein. "First, there's no shortage of software with this product. You get it all at once. You don't have to buy a library of software. There are 150 channels from day one" (and dozens more to come, as we'll see below).

"The second reason," said Hartenstein, "is we're offering picture and audio quality on virtually every channel that's previously been available only on laserdisc. It's making old TV sets act

nels, including a lot that cable systems can't take with their relatively paltry channel space. These include the newly added CNN International, Canada's cool Much Music channel and, a DSS bonus, 28 digital radio channels that tap into every speciality from eclectic rock and reggae to classical favorites and "For Kids Only."

One complaint voiced by cable companies (in anti-satellite advertising) and also by some subscribers is that buying a full load of DSS programs "does not price out very well compared with cable alternatives," as Ralph E. Abbott puts it. Abbott is one of several DSS buyers who responded to our inquiries for feedback on CompuServe's Consumer Electronics Forum. Clearly, Abbott would like to see more channels offered a la carte.

But USSB's Blum argues against comparing "apples and oranges," by which he means "a 70-channel (cable or Primestar) service versus a 150-channel (DSS) one." And Blum suggests we pay heed to such movie buff delights as the five-channel HBO package and the three-channel Showtime feed. USSB also offers for \$10.95 a month, which is about the price of a sin-



Sea TV: TracVision for yachts combines DSS reception with satellite tracking capabilities.

SMALL DISH



Wired: Monster Cable's DSS installation kit.

gle movie channel on cable.

In addition, movie channels recently went bilingual on USSB. With just a touch of the "alternative audio" button on the DSS remote, you can hear HBO, Cinemax or Showtime in Spanish. "You can even put the closed captioning up on screen in English with the dialog in Spanish, to help learn the language."

Still, isn't there a crime called too much of a good thing? How can a mere mortal find time to even surf 150 channels, with-out molting into Beavis or Butt-Head? "Of course, you can't," Blum responds. "What's terrific is coming home late after a hard day, knowing you have just two hours to spare in front of the TV, and being able to find exactly the kind of program you're looking for."

Virtually every new DSS subscriber has been buying at least one of USSB's services, after enjoying a free month's preview of all the available options. Some are content with the basic \$7.98 package covering MTV, *continued on page 70*



Universal's DSS-compatible VCR Pro 4 remote.

Primestar Turns Up The Heat

DSS was not alone in waking viewers up to the benefits of small and medium-dish reception. Primestar Partners ended last year with three times as many customers as it started the year with, a number "well north of 200,000," and perhaps as high as 250,000, according to president John Cusick. In achieving the increase, Primestar demonstrated that its medium-power, 69-channel satellite system is not going to roll over while high-powered newcomer DSS lures customers away.

To the contrary, Primestar is gearing up for a big league battle with DSS this year and especially next, when it moves into two new high-powered satellites and orbital locations, upgrades to MPEG II decoding and increases channel capacity to 200. Indeed, bolstered by new programs, a \$100 million ad campaign, \$500 million in equipment commitments from its partners, and the hard charging of its new chairman, James Gray, Primestar expects to reach profitability with a customer base of one million by the end of this year.

Formed eight years ago by leading cable companies Comcast, Continental Cablevision, Cox, Newhouse, Tele-Communications, Inc., and Time Warner, Primestar was originally designed to serve viewers outside cable's reach, folks who wouldn't mind giving up a little yard space for Primestar's 39-inch dish. Last year, it became a more serious venture, upgrading from analog to digital technology and increasing channel capacity.

This year, Primestar is risking cannibalizing its partners' prime business by targeting some areas that have already been cabled. "They're doing this because there's this little company out there called General Motors that's nibbling away," said Primestar spokesman Alan Levy in an interview with *Satellite News*. Primestar continues to lease rather than sell its system hardware as part of a package costing from \$30 to \$60 a month that includes programs.

Yet, here too, the company is starting to sing a different tune. Primestar is now courting consumer electronics dealers to showcase the service on its sales floors and take a cut on any subscribers it signs up. Meanwhile, project partner TCI is allowing satellite dealers to sell the Primestar equipment in a few "beta test" markets for \$1,095, including installation, according to product distributor Lee Taylor of Recreational Sports and Imports. The markets include Roseburg, Oregon, Seattle, Tucson, Albuquerque, Denver and Salt Lake City.

Primestar will expand its channel offerings to up to 80 this year, adding the likes of CNN International, the Starz! movie channel, and a second set of audio services. Like DSS, Primestar will also begin going after the bar and restaurant business, especially by touting its 15 regional and national sports channels, as well as its NHL and NBA League Pass series. However, Primestar won't be able to offer the NFL Sunday Ticket season pass. DirecTV holds the exclusive small-dish distribution rights for this feast of football.

-JT

DIGITAL FEVER, VEGAS STYLE

New digital disc and tape technologies energize a record-breaking, something-for-everyone CES.

If earlier Consumer Electronic Shows can be said to have flirted with the digital technologies sweeping through the realms of home entertainment, this year's extravaganza, held recently in Las Vegas, ushered them in with open arms. The science of zeros and ones, bits and bytes dominated CES as never before. Previews of forthcoming video and audio systems, progress reports about new products, and the increasing sophistication of video and computer games made it seem like the future had just breathlessly arrived.

Right at the start, the show's keynote speaker, Sony America president and CEO Michael Schulhof, warned an overflow audience that consumers "are getting ready to embrace an all-digital environment in entertainment" and that any companies that are unprepared "will, in no uncertain terms, jeopardize their entire business."

But there was scant evidence of unpreparedness. The four-day spectacular was the biggest ever, with 102,000 attendees filling the city's convention center, several temporary tents and exhibit space in half a dozen hotels. And, along

This report was written by Stan Pinkwas, Brent Butterworth, Ken Korman, Peter Barry, Lancelot Braithwaite and Stewart Applegath.

with the dramatic new-technology demonstrations, there were plenty of here-and-now products to be seen and sampled.

Among the video showstoppers were demonstrations by Sony of digital video discs (DVD) and digital videocassettes, two new formats the company says will be introduced sometime next year. DVD,

Mini/Maxi: Casio's Megavision monitor/projector.



developed with Philips, is embodied by a traditional-looking CD that can hold 3.7 gigabytes of data, enough, according to Sony, for about 135 minutes of high-quality video. Sony says it has transferred 30 films to the format so far using MPEG-2 digital compression and a technique called "dynamic bit allocation." This means the compression ratio can be adjusted to match the needs of the movie. A visually busy action film would use a faster data rate than a quieter film like *Sleepless in Seattle*.

At CES, Sony showed a chase scene from Clint Eastwood's *In the Line of Fire* on a TV with a split screen. Half the screen displayed a version digitized to DVD. The other half showed the same scene on a VHS tape, a laserdisc and a D-1 digital broadcast tape. The DVD picture quality was far better than VHS, noticeably better than laserdisc and hard to distinguish from D-1. The demonstration made a powerful impression.

(A few weeks after CES, Toshiba and Time Warner introduced their own DVD format, along with the support of a consortium of major companies. Sony said it would consider the new format, which is incompatible with its own, defusing for the moment the likelihood of a format war over digital video discs. See this issue's "Special Report" for a full account.)

Sony's digital videocassettes promise broadcast-quality recordings on two-hour or 4.5-hour compact tapes using a standard already agreed to by the industry. The digital tapes are 6mm wide and come in cassettes designed to be used with a new breed of digital VCRs. Two- and four-channel digital sound will be available, along with such features as instant search and crystal-clear freeze frame.

New kinds of set-top boxes for TV interactivity also made a splash at CES. Thomson and Sun Microsystems unveiled a digital interactive TV system suitable for video-on-demand, home-based ticket ordering and other interactive services. The components include video servers, a home decoder and Open TV, a multimedia operating environment. AT&T introduced the Information Center, a set-top box priced at \$329 that lets a TV display a variety of interactive online services designed to come in



Bits and Bytes:
Prototype of
Sony's digital
VCR and 2-
hour (top) and
4.5-hour (left)
videocassettes.
The compact
cassettes use
6mm tape.

to the box through ordinary phone lines.

Casio introduced another kind of set-top box, a videophone system to be sold by PhoneMate that uses conventional phone lines. The LT-70P can be connected to a TV or a PC and allows users to transmit video, via a built-in camera, and talk at the same time. Due in June, it's priced at \$1,280.

Two of 1994's hot technologies promised more to come this year. Thomson said it would expand production of its small-dish Digital Satellite System to keep pace with a demand that has exceeded its own most optimistic predictions, while Sony showed a prototype of the DSS receiver it will introduce this Summer.

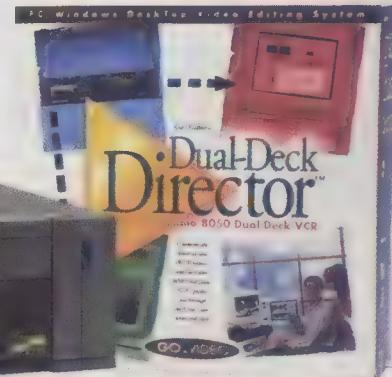
StarSight Telecast, present at about half a dozen different booths, announced a new automatic time-setting feature for TV and VCR clocks. In the coming year, several major manufacturers will be rolling out TVs, VCRs and TVCRs equipped to receive the onscreen program guide. An alternative onscreen system called VideoGuide was also present to launch its stand-alone decoder. The \$199 device offers a week's worth of program info, simple operation, and instant sports scores and news headlines.

Two accessories that caught our eye come from Videonics and a new California company called Play, Inc.

Videonics'
Edit Suite is an A/B-roll edit controller due this Spring for a suggested \$699. This desktop editing device works with consumer and professional VCRs, reads all time codes and is compatible with all popular edit formats. It's designed to run four video sources and hold 250 scenes.

For sending video to computers, Play fielded a high-definition, low-cost video

Desktop Ready: Videonics' Edit Suite controller and Go Video's GV 8050 VHS/8mm VCR, which comes with a customized editing program.



DIGITAL FEVER

grabber called the Snappy Video Snapshot. Priced at \$199, the Snappy is a small device that plugs into a PC's parallel port. It grabs video from any video source, from tape to TVs, funnels it into the PC and delivers a resolution of 1,500 by 1,125 pixels.

HOME THEATER

The big news in home theater was also revolutionary. It's Dolby Surround AC-3, the new digital format for surround sound. AC-3 provides six discrete tracks for left, center, right, left surround, right surround, and subwoofer. The advantages of this format over plain Dolby Pro-Logic are better channel separation and stereo surrounds, which can be used to create extraordinarily dramatic surround effects.

A couple of manufacturers previewed AC-3 in prototype form at last year's show, but demonstration glitches left some observers wondering exactly how good the new format would be. This year, there were few doubters. Several manufacturers—including ADA, Enlightened Audio Designs, Denon, JBL, Kenwood, Perreaux, Pioneer and Yamaha—demonstrated AC-3 sound in ways that left listeners with big smiles on their faces.

By the time you read this, you may actually be able to buy an AC-3 system and a few laserdiscs to go with it. Because the digital AC-3 soundtrack is encoded on one of the analog tracks of a laserdisc, you'll need a special laserdisc player with a separate RF output (on an RCA jack) for the analog track. Runco and Pioneer



Reality Check: Virtual Boy, Nintrendo's virtual reality goggles, and a showgoer in mid-game.

both offer players with AC-3 outputs. Pioneer made its support for AC-3 clear by putting an AC-3 output on every player in its line except for a \$299 budget model, the CLD-S104, that represents, on its own terms, a price breakthrough for combi players.

Of course, you'll also need an AC-3 surround decoder. It looks as if the first to market will be Enlightened Audio Designs' TheaterMaster, a versatile control center with switching for analog, conventional digital and AC-3 sources, and an integral digital-to-analog converter. Pioneer and Yamaha demonstrated more economical

approaches by incorporating AC-3 into A/V receivers. Yamaha's new receiver, the

\$1,500 AV-S2090, doesn't include an AC-3 decoding chip, but has jacks that interface it to a stand-alone AC-3 decoder, which Yamaha plans to introduce later this year for about \$600.

Two other interesting decoders caught our eye. One is a new model from Angstrom, designed by Mike Moffatt, the same guy who created Theta's great-sounding digital-to-analog converters. The other is from Citation, a rejuvenated line from Harman Kardon. With its new models, Citation plans to keep the great sound that has made Fosgate decoders among our favorites, while improving the ergonomics and appearance.

Although speaker systems won't really have to change to accommodate AC-3, that didn't stem the deluge of new speakers. The show's most interesting introductions included Definitive Technology's new \$3,000/pair BP2000, a high-end version of its popular bipolar tower speakers. Each BP2000 in-

corporates a powered



New Views:
Proton's 30-inch
widescreen TV and
Panasonic's PVQ505
VHS-C camcorder.



Bipolar Power:
Definitive Technology's
BP2000 speakers.

15-inch subwoofer. The bass, and everything else, sounded outstanding. There's also a new, beefed-up center channel speaker designed for use with the BP2000.

Speaking of bipolar speakers, Mirage introduced a line of affordable bipolars. Prices start at \$650/pair for the M590s, and go up to \$1,200/pair for the M1090s. Mirage's more expensive bipolar speakers have captured our hearts in the past, and the demo we heard of the M590s suggests the new speakers will continue that tradition.

CES also saw the introduction of two significant new THX systems, one from Energy and one from Atlantic Technology. Both use two midrange drivers surrounding a single tweeter to get the narrow vertical dispersion Lucasfilm requires

for THX certification. This approach may work better for music than the dual- and triple-tweeter THX speakers we've seen before. Energy didn't demo its system, but the Atlantic system,

which will

be priced at \$3,000, sounded great. Energy's shooting for a \$3,500 price. The Energy THX surrounds are a noteworthy bargain at \$350 a pair, and the company offers a slightly different non-THX version for just \$250.

The Atlantic demonstration included a visual treat, a Toshiba TW56D90 16:9 rear-projection set (winner of *Video Magazine's* recent Best Widescreen TV of the Year Award) outfitted with a Da-Lite rear-projection screen, instead of the one that comes with the set. The Da-Lite screen improved off-axis viewing and eliminated a slight hot spot. The color accuracy of the calibrated set could not have been better.

MULTIMEDIA

If multimedia was something of an



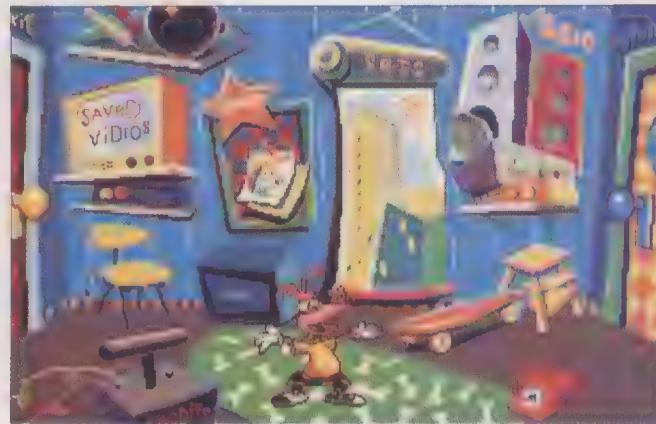
Video Grabber:
Play's Snappy captures
video for PCs.

upstart at last year's CES, this year's revealed a maturing industry looking for mainstream audiences. Game giants like Sega and Nintendo touted new high-tech hardware systems, while CD-ROM developers predicted, perhaps a bit optimistically, that there will be an astonishing 20 million CD-ROM drives in homes and businesses by year's end.

Long lines formed at the mammoth Nintendo booth as the company previewed Virtual Boy, the first true 3-D gaming system. Virtual Boy consists of a large pair of red and black goggles attached to a table-stand. It accepts tiny cartridges similar to those for Nintendo's handheld Game Boy. It's a RISC-based, 32-bit system that used dual LEDs to generate a monochromatic amber image (much like the computer screens of old) with a very convincing 3-D effect. The pinball and fighting games we tried were both very involving; we really didn't want to put them down. At a reasonable price of \$200, Virtual Boy should be a major hit when it reaches stores this summer.

Sega followed the successful launch of its 32X Genesis upgrade (the company says it sold 500,000 units before Christmas) by an-

Jam Machine:
Cartoon Network's
Toon Jam CD-ROM
lets kids create animated music videos.



nouncing that a one-piece Genesis/32X combination system will be available this fall for \$199. (The upgrade alone sells for \$149.) Sega also trotted out Superbowl champ and two-sport superstar Deion Sanders as the new spokesman for its Sega Sports line. "Neon Deion" will replace Joe Montana in Sega's popular NFL title and star in a new series of football and baseball games.

Sega's high-end Saturn system and Sony's competing Playstation were available for sneak previews. Judging from the early Japanese titles on display (the systems are currently available in Japan), both deliver graphics and game play at least as good as 3DO, the most advanced system now in the U.S. Expect Saturn and Playstation in time for Christmas for about \$400 each.

Panasonic showed a new 3DO player, the top-loading FZ-10, for \$399, featuring a smaller footprint and a new memory management system for saving games. Add-on MPEG-1 full-motion video cartridges were announced for both the Panasonic player and for GoldStar's 3DO

continued on page 80



Monty Mania:
A best-of Python sketch collection for CD-i.

PERSONAL BESTS



Nightmare's Jack Frost
You like me, you really like me!

With Academy Award season in full media bloom, it's appropriate to look at the laserdisc releases of the past year that were designed to meet the cravings of movie buffs who want as much of the film experience in their homes as possible. Special-edition laserdiscs offer superior picture and sound as well as extras that enhance the films they accompany, and that aren't available anywhere else. This high-quality, under-appreciated format deserves a measure of recognition for going to Olympian lengths to make movies a pleasure to watch and study. The past year has seen more than its share of great special editions. To help you select those movies presented especially well on disc with unique and appropriate extras, the collectibles among the contenders, we honor the best with awards of our own. And now, the envelopes, please...

Most Impressive Disc: The collector's edition of Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*. Thanks to the determination of Ken Rose, CBS Video's VP and General Manager, everything about this boxed set exudes quality. Special touches include its eye-catch-

A videophile's Oscar-season awards for the year's most outstanding laserdiscs

ing design, especially the use of black-and-white stripes, which evoke the Ascot races sequence; its sturdy and attractive disc sleeves, as opposed to flimsy cellophane-like sleeves; and the in-depth and informative color brochure, reminiscent of programs given out during road-show productions during the '50s and '60s.

The edition also includes six frames of the original movie print, which is useful to viewers who don't know what 70mm film and SuperPanavision 70 (a non-anamorphic process) look like; six exquisite reproductions of Cecil Beaton's costume designs (even I found myself gazing at them lovingly, and I'm normally not crazy about this sort of thing); a 24K Gold CD of the film score, and much more.

What's on the disc itself is equally exemplary. Foremost is the film's meticulous restoration by Robert A. Harris,

who also restored *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Spartacus*, and his partner James C. Katz. Their work is so brilliant that this viewer, familiar only with the two previous, very inferior laserdisc versions of *My Fair Lady*, feels as if the film has suddenly appeared for the first time. A long, engaging documentary analyzes George Cukor's direction and includes such delights as Audrey Hepburn singing "Wouldn't It Be Loverly?" and "Show Me" before Marni Nixon's voice replaced hers. Decide for yourself which voice is better for the film.

The aspect ratio is 2.21:1, appropriate for material taken from a 65/70mm spherical source. The framing is so exact that there is more visual material on this release than was ever seen theatrically in either 35mm or 70mm versions. The transfer from a new interpositive produced directly from the restoration negative is excellent: THX video clarity, impressive colors, and pleasing surround-sound. I can't exaggerate the superior merits of this disc. Granted, its \$124.95 price is expensive, but unlike some recent pricey, disappointing collector's editions, here you definitely get what you pay for.

Best Extras: The thirtieth-anniversary edition of *The Sound of Music*. Because of all the satires about the saccharine nature of this film, I've actually

David Morrell is the author of *First Blood*, *Desperate Measures* and other best-selling novels.



Song Meisters: Andrews and Plummer, ■
Sound of Music presented wide with extras.

avoided it until now. My loss. It's sweet, yes, but it's also awfully good film-making, and it shares with *My Fair Lady* a theme almost unheard of today—the desire to improve oneself. Even if you're not a fan of *The Sound of Music*, the packaging, the excellence of which rivals that of *My Fair Lady*, should interest any laserdisc devotee. An eight-page color brochure introduces the film and the disc's supplemental materials. An insightful book explains how master writer Ernest Lehman (*North by Northwest*, *West Side Story*) adapted the Broadway musical into a screenplay. An accompanying 24K Gold CD includes previously unreleased music.

The extras on the disc are even more outstanding. Director Robert Wise provides a useful analog-track commentary. There's a featurette, followed by an 87-minute "making of" documentary, and something I've never encountered before—an analog track to the documentary, with Ernest Lehman discussing his screenplay for 36 minutes. There are step-by-step histories

of Austria, of Salzburg, of the Nazi occupation, of the real-life characters upon whom the story is based, and of Rodgers and Hammerstein's collaboration on the stage musical. The THX transfer is excellent, the sound pleasing. The effectively presented 2.2:1 aspect ratio is taken from original Todd-AO 65mm source materials. Like *My Fair Lady*, this edition of *The Sound of Music* exudes quality, and although it too is costly (\$129.95), you're getting fair value.

Best Expanded Film: The collector's edition of *Dances with Wolves*. It's becoming more common for laserdiscs to include scenes that directors had reluctantly cut from the theatrical versions of their films. In the case of *Dances with Wolves*, Kevin Costner went farther than any other director by expanding his film by an hour. There are numerous other merits to the edition: A making-of featurette is included, as is a CD of John Barry's haunting score and a book, *Dances with Wolves: The Illustrated Story of the Epic Film*. The aspect ratio has finally been presented correctly, in a 2.35:1 frame, not 2:1 as on the previous disc. On the down side, we also get six murky lobby cards. Finally, it would have made a good package even better if Orion or Image had included information about what the extra scenes do for the movie, exactly how many minutes were added and, most important, where the material was inserted. This part of the job feels rushed, especially for \$124.99.

Clearest Image: The collector's edition of Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*



Disney's *Aladdin*

LASER'S TOP 10

MOST IMPRESSIVE DISC
My Fair Lady
(FoxVideo)

BEST EXTRAS
The Sound of Music
(FoxVideo)

BEST EXPANDED FILM
Dances With Wolves
(Orion/Image)

CLEAREST IMAGE
Nightmare Before Christmas
(Touchstone)

BEST COLOR
Aladdin
Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs
(Disney/Image)

BEST VALUE
Speed
(FoxVideo)

BEST SOUND
Jurassic Park
(MCA/Universal)

BEST COMMENTARY
Prince of Tides
(Criterion)

BEST MUSICAL
Oklahoma!
(Fox Video)

Christmas. Many qualities distinguish this pack-age. The movie is a delightfully macabre holiday fable with awesome stop-action photography, sometimes combined with animation. The laserdisc editions adds tons of extras, including a lengthy documentary; two short films, *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie*, by Tim Burton; a short film by director Henry Selick; *Nightmare* outtakes; a hand-somely-illustrated companion book; and analog commentary by Selick—all for \$99.95. But what I kept saying to myself again and



Watchers: Graham Greene (left) and Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves* with scenes restored.

again was, "Look how clear the image is." The THX CAV disc is presented with barely noticeable black bars at the top and bottom in what is sometimes called European widescreen, with an aspect ratio of 1.66:1. The sound is deep and full, with a soundtrack by Danny Elfman (*Batman*, *Batman Returns*).

Best Color: A tie between *Aladdin* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The former has the most intense colors (especially amazing Dayglo-like reds) that I can recall seeing on any disc, made all the more remarkable because there isn't any sign of blooming or bleeding. The THX CAV *Aladdin* is framed minimally at a 1.66:1 aspect ratio and has dynamite surround sound. But for \$49.95 (I can't help grousing), it could have included more extras than just a trailer for the film. A featurette, for example, was included in the excellent and similarly priced laserdisc for *Beauty and the Beast*, and the Japanese import of *Aladdin*.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs takes a different approach to color: traditional, solid and deep. The original negative was showing dirt and wear. Disney technicians restored it to spectacular condition, allowing us to see the film in a way that hasn't been possible for many years. Indeed, it has the sparkle of a brand-new work. For the attractive collector's edition (\$99.99), there is an illustrated volume, *The Making of the Classic Film*, as well as 10 lithographs of theatrical posters for the film: some are eye-catching enough to display. A separate disc, in its own sturdy and informative jacket, contains a wealth of extras, including a featurette, deleted scenes, storyboards, discussions about animation and how to photo-

graph it, a step-by-step analysis of the restoration, and on and on. The CAV mode allows the viewer to enjoy the impressive, colorful artwork frame by frame. It's a treat for the eyes.

Best Value: *Speed*, at \$29.95 with THX quality. This is an unbelievable deal. The gaps in the logic of this "Die Hard on a bus" mad-bomber tale become manifest with repeated viewing, but the excitement of the high-speed ride provided by Sandra Bullock and an amazingly pumped-up Keanu Reeves (*Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*) make logic irrelevant. Jan De Bont (Paul Verhoeven's director of cinematography on *Basic Instinct*) gives the film style and pace. The surround sound is explosive. The aspect ratio of 2.35:1 provides an epic feel. Two people can't pay for movie tickets, parking, popcorn, and a babysitter for what it costs to buy this first-rate disc.

Best Sound: *Jurassic Park*. The picture-rattling, ground-stomping, dinosaur-shrieking effects on this disc make it excellent for demonstrating a surround system. As with many films that

BESTS

stress sound-effects, the dialog is thin by comparison, and the narrative is weak. But the picture quality is excellent, and the award is well-earned. The CAV version, at \$74.98, and the CLV version, overpriced at \$44.98, are virtually indistinguishable, and both are THX-certified. *The Fugitive*, *Hard Target*, and *In the Line of Fire* also have memorable sound.

Most Interesting Commentary: Barbra Streisand's analog comments on Criterion's director's edition of *The Prince of Tides*. Not many discs are released with alternate-track commentary, and of those, almost all are instructive. Robert Wise's commentary for *The*



Transit Cop: Keanu Reeves, *Speed* demon.

Sound of Music and Henry Selick's for *Nightmare before Christmas* come to mind, as does Jonathan Demme's for Criterion's edition of *The Silence of the* *continued on page 92*



Sound and Fury: Dern and Neill in *Jurassic Park* (left), and Streisand directing *Prince of Tides*.



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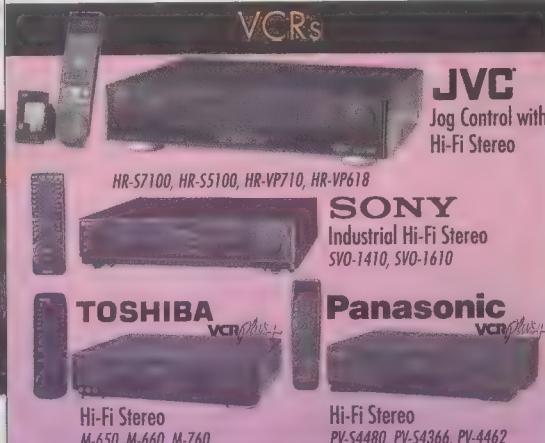
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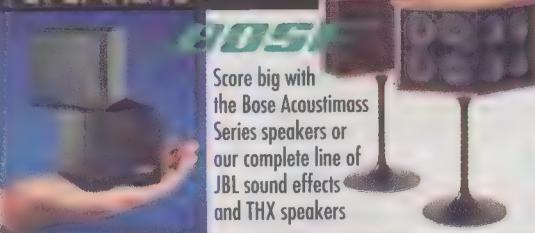
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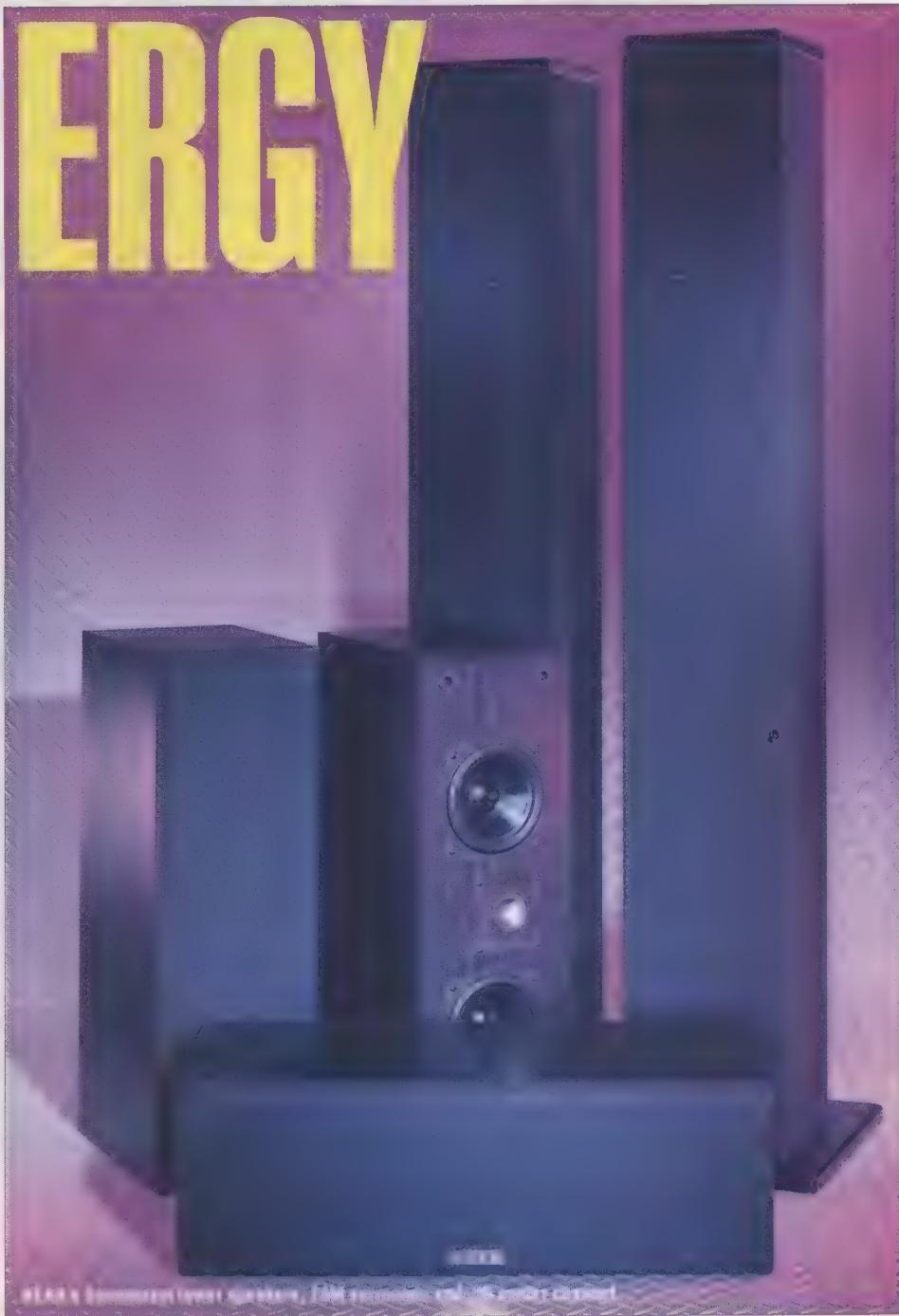
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HOME THEATER FORUM: THE CASE FOR SYNERGY

Surround speakers, a processor/pre-amp & a D/A converter bring a room to life.

If specifications represented all you'd need to know about a component's sound quality, it would be relatively simple to assemble a home theater. You'd choose the amplifier with the highest power output for a given price, the speakers with the widest frequency response, the laserdisc player with the most features for the lowest cost, and so on. Hello? Reality check. High-performance components are not intended to function in a vacuum, but as part of a system. That's why specifications tell only part of the story. The rest comes from carefully listening to how components sound in real rooms with other components.

We've created "Home Theater Forum" to better examine home theater components in context—as part of an integrated equipment ensemble designed to help products show what they're



DAN WAGNER

capable of, and to give us insights into how components can best be used. For the Forum, products will be auditioned in *Video Magazine's* Home Theater facility, a flexible room with reference-caliber equipment designed to help us take the full measure of a product's capabilities by scrutinizing it under controlled conditions. Constructed primarily of concrete and plaster, with a volume of about 5,500 cubic feet, our home theater supports rather than reinforces low-bass/high-volume transients. A minimal use of acoustical treatment materials yields a natural mid- and high-frequency tonal balance.

In addition to providing a sonically neutral testing environment, our facility can accommodate a virtually limitless variety of speaker placements. By not having to make set-up compromises to avoid room interactions, we can pay more attention to placement and sound optimization procedures in assessing speaker performance.

We auditioned three products for our initial Forum: the Acurus American Custom Theatre I processor/preamp, the NEAR Soundmast surround system with JIB center channel and 20M surrounds, and Audio Alchemy's Digital Decoding Engine v1.1, a digital/analog converter. Appropriately, the NEAR speakers and the ACT I processor represent first forays into the home theater marketplace by established audiophile companies. At a time when video has transformed listening rooms into media rooms, the survival of many specialty audio manufacturers will depend on their ability to translate high-end expertise into home theater credibility.

The theater system we used to audition these products consisted of the Pioneer Elite CLD-97 and CLD-D703 laserdisc players for our audio and video sources, and the Parasound HCA-1206 power amp which delivers 120 watts into six channels. Processing references included the Proceed PAV by Madrigal, the Lexicon CP-3, and the Fosgate Model Four. We also used the Counterpoint Home Cinema speakers for comparison purposes. To supplement the bass out-



Audio Alchemy's DDE digital/analog converter (top) and Acurus' ACT 1 processor/preamp

put we have the Definitive Technology Powerfield 1800 subwoofer, driven by its own 500-watt amp. The video side of things is handled by a Mitsubishi VS-1250 front projector in conjunction with a Dwin LD-2 line doubler and audio/video control center. The system is wired throughout with Monster Cable.

We expected this approach would help us turn up the kinds of synergies, or mutual performance enhancements, that components often reveal, and we encountered a few. For reasons that can be hard to fathom, given the thousands of products and combinations that are available and possible, components do not always perform equally well with all other components. For example, the Proceed PAV's Dolby Pro-Logic mode works well with almost all speakers, but we found its roll-off of high-frequency detail made for a poor match with the NEAR speaker system. The combination yielded a relatively dull treble presentation. However, the Soundmasts' tonal balance was nearly ideal when used with either the Fosgate Model Four (\$999) or the Acurus ACT I, the processors we employed for the bulk of the auditions.

For its part, the ACT I would not process the Pioneer CLD-97's composite output through its video loop without an unacceptable level of noise and color instability. Yet Pioneer's CLD-D703, which offers similar overall performance at half the price, albeit without the 97's uncanny image sharpness, interfaced just fine with the ACT I, and was used for the remainder of the review.

I mention these interactions as ob-

servations rather than criticisms. High-performance consumer electronics are not intended to function in a vacuum, but as parts of a system. Part of the challenge of building a fine system is to combine components that interact well. One way to do this is to work with your dealer or installer to ensure that each component enhances the performance of the rest of your system. Ask about the possibility of auditioning a product in your home for a week or two with the option of exchanging it if it doesn't fit in as expected. Above all, be sensitive to the possibility of synergy.

TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

Mondial Designs, the Ardsley, New York-based manufacturer of Acurus and Aragon components, has led the way in offering top value in high-end electronics. Considering the esteem in which I hold its other products, I was eager to get my hands on Mondial's first home theater component, the \$899 Acurus ACT I.

Adorned simply with a pair of large silver knobs—one for power on/off and source, the other for volume—on the left of its faceplate, the ACT I is handsome in a sleek, minimalist manner. But the real beauty of any Mondial product lies in its innards, and the ACT I is no exception. Visual inspection reveals top-notch electrical components and an Analog Devices Pro-Logic chipset similar to the one used by Madrigal in the Proceed PAV (\$4,200). Construction is of high quality. Onscreen video menus provide a user's

only access to the ACT I's mode and status information, which can be inconvenient if your monitor is not on.

Operated in the stereo-only (bypass) mode, the ACT I's high-end pedigree was immediately apparent. The hallmarks of its musical presentation were an impressive dynamic authority, a large soundstage with distinct instrumental images, and excellent tonal balance across the critical middle of the frequency range. The ACT I gave acoustic guitars a wonderful sense of overtone and detail, but never sounded aggressive or fatiguing. So good was the ACT I's stereophonic performance that I rate it among the best under-\$1,000 line-level preamplifiers available.

Switching to video, we found the S-video output was the one to use in our system, and the choice was a clear one. Experimentation showed that the composite output introduced some video noise on a high-resolution front projec-

tion set-up. Sonically, the Acurus excelled in the three-channel Pro-Logic mode. The sound was explosively dynamic, with good tonal balance and a fine rendering of detail. Steering was pinpoint and integration between the left, center and right channels was seamless, providing a flattering counterpoint to the onscreen action. The three-channel soundstage maintained the transparency and cohesiveness that distinguished the ACT I in stereo-bypass mode.

For surround sound, the ACT I's five-channel Pro-Logic performance was good, similar to that of many fine Pro-Logic receivers. As long as a movie soundtrack contained a constant, prominent surround signal, as in the opening of *Blown Away*, the Acurus proved very capable. But when the processor was called upon to "select out" information to route to the effects channels, the ACT I's transition from front to rear was somewhat abrupt.

The same type of transition heard on the Fosgate Model Four, for example, was smoother and more detailed. Listening to *Batman Returns*, first through the ACT I, then through the Model Four, demonstrated this. The ACT I, like similarly priced processor/receivers, loses some of the enveloping nuances that are encoded on Dolby soundtracks, which more sophisticated units make both evident and thrilling.

Your decision to purchase an ACT I should be based on your priorities: Are you primarily interested in a quality preamplifier with added processing capabilities or in a surround-sound processor? The ACT I makes an excellent stereo preamp that offers remote control and standard surround-sound functions. Videophiles who demand more of their decoder and less of their preamp may be happier with the decoder in the costlier Fosgate Model Four, which, however,

continued on page 98

HOW TO FINE TUNE YOUR HOME THEATER

Investing money in fine components is no guarantee that a home theater will sound the way you expect. Without proper set-up, even great equipment will not deliver the performance of which it is capable. On the other hand, with careful optimization, even inexpensive hardware can provide satisfying surround sound. All that's required is a little patience, a willingness to experiment, and knowledge of a few home theater fundamentals. Here's a quick guide to preparing your room for the power of home theater sound.

Let's start by assuming you've already chosen a room for your system, and that you have the ability to darken the room sufficiently to ensure pleasurable viewing. The next step is to determine the room's sonic character; that is, whether the room is "live" or "dead." Enter the room, close the door and clap your hands as hard and loudly as you can (it's okay, you're trying to make noise). Observe what happens to the sound: Does it reverberate, which is characteristic of "live" rooms? Or does it immediately decay into silence, which would indicate the room is, acoustically, dead?

Hard, reflective surfaces like bare or glass walls, sparse furnishings and light draperies are tell-tale signs of a live room.

If the room is overly reverberant, mid and high frequencies will sound projected and irritating. Image localization will be poor. While room treatments, which are available at audio/video salons, can tame acoustical problems, you can avoid the expense and visual intrusion of these items by adjusting your furnishings. Hanging tapestries on bare walls, installing heavier draperies and placing throw rugs between the front speakers and the listening position are particularly effective ways to mitigate room interactions.

If, on the other hand, you learn that your room is dead, lighten up! Literally. Remove heavy carpets, drapes and plush furniture from the room or add reflective surfaces, like glass-covered pictures. These simple actions should cure the high frequency loss and lifeless dynamics that plague overly damped listening rooms.

SPOTTING THE SPEAKERS

Once you've achieved a relatively neutral tonal balance, it's time to rough in the speaker positions. Place the front left and right speakers at least three feet from room boundaries. Room boundaries include the

continued on page 98

5 STEPS TO AN IDEAL ROOM

- Select a room that can be easily darkened
- Strive for a neutral tonal balance. If the room is overly reverberant, dampen it. If sonically dead, enliven it.
- Place front speakers for video within two feet of the sides of the screen and slightly ahead of it.
- Aim front-facing rear surrounds at or slightly behind the primary seating.
- Balance the speaker channels with a sound level meter to produce a seamless soundstage.

TAPES & DISCS

NEW RELEASES



River Runners: Meryl Streep and fellow rafters run into a rough patch in *Wild River*.

FEATURE FILMS

The River Wild

1994. Meryl Streep, Kevin Bacon, David Straithairn; dir. Curtis Hanson. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 112 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed or full-frame \$39.98. MCA/Universal.

There's no truth to the rumor that Dustin Hoffman will headline the next installment of *Friday the 13th*, but Meryl Streep has descended almost that far with *The River Wild*. Crudely effective and predictable as the sunrise, this brutal thriller from director Curtis Hanson (*The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*) stars the master thespian as a veteran white-water rafter who's shanghaied into escorting two bad guys (Bacon, John C. Reilly) down a treacherous river. Can she outwit these scum and save her wimpy husband (Straithairn) and young son (Joseph Mazzello)? Silly question.

Exuding boundless self-confi-

dence, Streep is great fun to watch as the latest version of the old-fashioned macho hero; investing a thinly conceived character with impressive emotional range, not to mention looking terrific, she overshadows the material. So do her co-stars. Straithairn almost brings credibility to the clichéd milquetoast who becomes a real man in the face of danger. The ever-entertaining Bacon snarls and struts villainously, and delivers one of the few good lines, insisting to his captives that he's not really evil, just "a different kind of nice guy." Despite its sparkling cast, *The River Wild* is a corny B-movie at heart.

—Jon Young

Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould

1994. Colm Feore; dir. François Girard. Surround. (NR) 92 min. priced for rental. LD \$34.95. Columbia/TriStar

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould was an original who goaded us to

rethink everything—interpretations of individual works, music and performance in general, as well as topics far beyond. It's only fitting he should inspire a new kind of film biography.

Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould is a collage that examines his genius, eccentric character and legacy one bit at a time. Most of the pieces are dramatized incidents that are charged with a visual wit that approximates Gould's verbal wit. There are also real interviews, nearly abstract close-ups of things like his piano or the many pills he took (he was a hypochondriac who died of a stroke at 50), and even an old Norman McLaren animation set to a Gould performance.

The spirit of Gould seems to inhabit the Shakespearean actor Colm Feore, and of course the music, mostly Gould recordings, is splendid. The odd structure gives us a balanced, hugely entertaining, portrait of a musical giant.

After watching this amazing film, you can see the real Gould at work in 16 programs on laserdisc or tape from Sony Classical. Most of these are CBC telecasts; a recent release features a performance of Gould's signature piece, the Bach *Goldberg Variations*.

—Sol Louis Siegel



Big: Glenn Gould, enigmatic musical giant.



ken korman



Ball Boys: Brooks and Fraser, ready to play.

The Scout

1994. Albert Brooks, Brendan Fraser, Dianne Wiest; dir. Michael Ritchie. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 101 min. priced for rental. FoxVideo.

Though it fouled out at the box office, *The Scout* is a scrappy baseball fantasy that throws a few gentle curves at the sports film playbook. Al Percoco (Brooks) is a sad-sack scout who's been spitefully dispatched to Mexico on a futile quest for new Yankees. There he encounters the phenomenal Steve Nebraska (Fraser), a likable but loony player with a questionable past. Chaperoning the vulnerable Nebraska in the big city, Percoco becomes a reluctant father figure, forced to consult psychiatrist Henrietta Aaron (Wiest), to ensure that Nebraska is mentally ready for the big time.

The therapy threatens to undermine both the player's World Series debut and the film itself. A battle for the boy's soul emerges as a major subplot, then disappears, as if the film-makers realized it was too complex for breezy comedic resolution. Thankfully, the gap is bridged by Fraser's endearing performance. He switch-hits easily between goofy antics and sweet melancholy.

Despite the presence of real-life

sports notables like Keith Hernandez, George Steinbrenner and Bob Costas, one diehard baseball fan in my crowd condemned the film's loose portrayal of baseball training procedures. Perhaps the strike made him grumpy. This viewer found *The Scout* not without errors, but a winning diversion nonetheless. — **Marianne Meyer**

Arizona Dream

1990. Johnny Depp, Jerry Lewis, Faye Dunaway; dir. Emir Kusturica. Surround, cc. (R) 118 min. priced for rental. Warner.

Axel (Depp) lives in Manhattan and works for the state's Department of Conservation, giving electric shocks to fish. He reluctantly returns to Arizona, where he was raised, to attend the wedding of Leo Sweetie (Lewis), Axel's uncle and childhood hero. There he meets crazy rich widow Elaine (Dunaway), who is obsessed with Papua, New Guinea, and her stepdaughter Grace



Dream Cycle:
Dunaway
and Depp in
Arizona
Dream.

(Lili Palmer), who wants to kill herself so that she can be reincarnated as a turtle.

What can you say about a movie where Johnny Depp and Jerry Lewis play the normal characters? Completed but unreleased for several years, *Arizona Dream* is the English-language debut of Yugoslav director Emir Kusturica (*When Father Was Away on Business*). It reeks of Eastern European whimsy, though less so than it did before 25 minutes were cut for this 118-minute version. Unfortunately, Kusturica's dollops of whimsy were the best thing about it: What's left is occasionally amusing, but more often simply weird.

— **M. Faust**

How low can Hollywood go? The successes of *Forrest Gump* and *Dumb and Dumber* have apparently convinced studio bigwigs that dumb movies are no longer enough: If you really want to strike it rich, you have to make dumb movies about dumb people. So as 1994, the weakest year for film in at least a decade, fades into memory, we can look forward to upcoming productions like *Idiots* and *The Stupids*, among others. (Unfortunately, I'm not making this up.) It seems the studios have forgotten that entertainment doesn't have to be brainless to have mass appeal. For proof, they need look no further than FoxVideo's 25th Anniversary edition of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (laserdisc, \$99.98).

One of the most successful films of 1969, *Butch Cassidy* is no *Citizen Kane*. It relies too heavily on the easy charm of its stars, Paul Newman, Robert Redford and Katherine Ross, and sometimes settles for cuteness in place of depth or humor. But director George Roy Hill was obviously interested in making an excellent film, not just a popular and lucrative one. From William Goldman's thoughtful script to Conrad Hall's gorgeous cinematography, the movie doesn't pander. Presented here in widescreen for the first time since its theatrical run, *Butch Cassidy*'s pleasures are substantial.

The laserdisc's lengthy supplement is a mixed bag. It includes the dullest running commentary I've ever heard. Both George Roy Hill and Conrad Hall sound like they just came out of a deep sleep. Far better is an hour's worth of video interviews, taped in 1994, with the stars and screenwriter Goldman. Paul Newman, forever blessed with the gift of perspective, gets the final word on movies then and now: "I'm nostalgic for the days when people shot films. Now they shoot budgets, release dates—they shoot somebody's bonus. But *Butch Cassidy* was shot."

Amen.

The Browning Version

1994. Albert Finney, Greta Scacchi, Mathew Modine; dir. Ronald Harwood. Stereo, cc. (R) 97 min. priced for rental. Paramount.

End of term at a posh British prep school brings the end of many other things for Andrew Crocker-Harris (Finney), head of classical studies. After 18 years, he's being forced out without a pension by the school's administration, which wants to bring in a new instructor more adept in modern languages. It also brings the end of his marriage to a younger woman (Scacchi) who can no longer conceal her contempt for him. Worst of all, it signals the end of his self-respect. Confronted by evidence of how disliked he was by his students, this brilliant scholar is forced to consider that he may have wasted his entire life, a dead soul teaching dead languages.

While Terence Rattigan's 1939 play may seem like an odd choice for a film remake, its theme of conflict between classical studies and modern education is compellingly updated by playwright Ronald Harwood (*The Dresser*). But the soul of the film is Finney. Without so much as raising his voice, he commands your attention to a character who has faded out of his own life. It is a tremendously moving performance, on a par with Anthony Hopkins in *The Remains of the Day*. —MF



Teacher's Pet: Albert Finney and Greta Scacchi

The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl

1993. Doc. dir. Ray Muller. Mono. (NR) 180 min. \$89.95. Kino.

Like its subject, *The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* is fasci-



Roll 'Em:
Leni Riefenstahl
(center) on location
for the Third Reich.

nating, infuriating and unforgettable. This three-hour documentary chronicles the ups and downs of Hitler's brilliant propagandist, ranging from her early days as a dancer and glamorous star of German silent film, to the creation of her 1930's masterworks *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, to her latter-day activities as a photographer of marine life and African tribes. Combining clips from her works and contemporary interviews with the still-dynamic director, who was pushing 90 at the time of filming, this combination of homage and exposé salutes Riefenstahl's genius without apologizing for her complicity in unspeakable horrors: Seeing the stirring, innovative techniques she applied to the celebration of Nazism, it's easy to regret that Riefenstahl didn't dedicate her talents to a worthier cause.

Wonderful Horrible Life packs a punch despite segments that appear out of chronological order, and repetitiveness; 30 minutes could have been trimmed without losing pertinent material. Above all, the film founders when it confronts Riefenstahl on her role in the Third Reich. However often the interviewer challenges her assertions of ignorance about the extent of Hitler's evil, Riefenstahl delivers a stock, disingenuous answer about being a politically-unaware artist. Revisiting the issue throughout the movie is a futile gesture intended to underscore the filmmakers'

disapproval, but otherwise adds nothing. This flawed epic captures a gifted maverick in all her charismatic, perplexing glory.

—Jon Young

The Little Rascals

1994. Travis Tedford, Bug Hall; dir. Penelope Spheeris. Surround, cc. (PG) 83 min. \$24.98. MCA/Universal.

A soulless, deftly executed facsimile, *The Little Rascals* reproduces the look and jokes of the original classic shorts, without any of their merry abandon. Bringing favorites from different generations of the gang together—including Stymie (Kevin Jamal Woods), Spanky (Tedford), Alfalfa (Hall), Darla (Brittany Ashton Holmes) and Froggy (Jordan Warkol)—into one sprawling mob, this lukewarm romp seems more a time-warp echo than a project with a purpose of its own. Having already proven her skill at refurbishing TV properties with *Wayne's World* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*, director Penelope Spheeris keeps the recycled gags coming at a brisk pace, but can't instill any spark in her young performers.

The familiar story revolves around Alfalfa's affections for Darla, two scary bullies (Sam Saletta, Blake Jeremy Collins), a snooty rich kid (Blake McIver Ewing) and a big soap-box derby. A few moments, such as the kitty-litter sandwich and Alfalfa's dreadful talent-show crooning, may

provoke smiles, but it's more fun to watch for cameos by the likes of Mel Brooks, George Wendt, Daryl Hannah, Donald Trump, Lea Thompson, Reba McEntire and Whoopi Goldberg. *The Little Rascals* isn't so much bad as unnecessary.

—JY

Second Best

1994. William Hurt, Chris Cleary Miles; Dir. Chris Menges. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 105 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed \$34.98. Warner.



When a celebrated cinematographer moves into the director's chair, you might expect him to choose epic visual subjects. But Chris Menges has consistently chosen more intimate topics in films like *A World Apart* and *Criss-Cross* which are about relationships between parents and children. *Second Best* is the story of Graham Holt (Hurt) a 42-year-old bachelor and postmaster of a small Welsh town. Increasingly lonely since the death of his mother and the stroke that rendered his father catatonic, he decides to adopt a child.

Because adoption agencies are leery of single men, his choices are limited to older, troubled children. He's matched with James (Miles), a 10-year-old who idolizes his real father, an imprisoned criminal. After years spent in the social services system, James has become expert at manipulating people to get what he wants, and there's nothing he wants more than to be reunited with his father. Still, Graham is willing to take his chances.

Second Best is a predictable package in a fancy box, though it has touching moments. Hurt turns in his usual able performance without getting lost in his Welsh accent, and there are nice bits along the way from Jane Horrocks, Prunella Scales and John (no relation) Hurt.

—MF

LASERDISCS

The Prince of Tides

1991. Nick Nolte, Barbra Streisand, Blythe Danner; dir. Streisand. Digital surround. (R) 132 min. plus supplement, 2 sides CLV/2 sides CAV. \$99.95. Criterion.

With Barbra Streisand back in the spotlight because of last year's concert tour, Criterion's treatment of *The Prince of Tides* may transcend its long-delayed arrival in stores, a delay reportedly due to the director/producer/star's unyielding perfectionism. The new widescreen transfer is only a slight improvement over that of Columbia TriStar's disc, with deeper colors and somewhat sharper detail, so the burden of justifying the price falls on the alternate-channel commentary by Streisand and on the Criterion extras occupying part of side 3 on the CAV disc and all of side 4.

Barbra's fans will certainly be enthralled by this package. It's a great pleasure to hear her running comments on the minutiae of filmmaking. She seems intimately familiar with all of it, from choosing camera angles to details of costume and makeup. Virtually every scene elicits a comment, whether

10 alternate or deleted scenes that are presented, most are too brief to make any impression, and their text introductions are hopelessly vague. There's little insight into why she made the choices she did, but much lamentation about the put-upon film artist who has to scissor good moments. Other extras consist of children's auditions, rehearsals, interviews, still photos, blown takes and similar ephemera.

As for Streisand's vaunted script input, we are shown a few pages with her notes in the margins and a few printed lines of dialog with her italicized improvements, as indeed they are. Given that Streisand's *Prince* boiled down a ponderous, meandering 600-page novel into a keenly-observed romance about coming to terms with a traumatic past, why not present the entire annotated script? That's where much of the film's achievement took place.

—Andy Wickstrom

Once Upon a Time in America

1984. Robert DeNiro, James Woods, Elizabeth McGovern; dir. Sergio Leone. Digital mono. (R) 226 min. 4 sides CLV



insightful or playful.

Less thrilling is the supplement, which seemed promising because director Streisand is fond of shooting alternate versions of scenes and making final decisions in the editing room. But of the

\$39.98. Warner.

Sergio Leone directed barely half a dozen films in his lifetime. He spent 10 years on his last, *Once Upon a Time in America*, time during which he might have made several others. Yet *America*



Leone Ranger. DeNiro escapes
in *Once Upon a Time in America*

is such a masterpiece it nearly makes up for the films that might have been.

Like Leone's westerns, *America* is a genre film only on the surface. This gangster saga is both a history of 20th Century America, from a decidedly European perspective, and an essay on the power of memory, regret and guilt. Gliding back and forth between 1923, 1933 and 1968, the film has a hallucinatory, fantastic quality; the entire climax may, in fact, be a drug-induced delusion.

The story exists in the memory of "Noodles" Aaronson (DeNiro, whom Leone uses exquisitely), a one-time hood who has spent 35 years in self-exile after the death of his friend and partner Max (Woods). Mysteriously summoned home, he recalls his past as a teenage punk in Manhattan's Lower East side, and as a powerful young man unwilling to accompany his cohorts into the big money of political graft and union manipulation. At nearly four hours, *America* is not a minute too long, with a specific gravity that keeps you transfixed. It is both brutal and beautiful, often at the same time, with one of Ennio Morricone's most gorgeous scores. The letterboxed disc contains no supplements or extras, but they're not needed. The film is, by itself, nearly perfect.

—MF

Year of the Dragon

1985. Mickey Rourke, John Lone; dir. Michael Cimino. Digital surround, letterboxed. (R) 136 min. CAV side 3 \$49.98. MGM/UA.

Fans of Michael Cimino and Mickey Rourke who bought the 1986 pan-and-scan videocassette or laserdisc of *Year of the Dragon* can finally give 'em away. The long-awaited widescreen edition of Cimino's Chinatown opus has arrived.

Considering the drubbing Cimino had recently taken for *Heaven's Gate*, it's amazing he was able, much less enabled, to make this film. Though *Year of the Dragon*'s photography and editing sometimes falls short of Cimino's trademark perfectionism, it more than makes up for it with excitement and complexity.

Dragon offers a sort of cross



between *Dirty Harry* and *The Godfather*, with Rourke giving a DeNiro-caliber performance as an obsessed cop hellbent on exposing the Chinese Mafia. At the time of the film's theatrical release, critics dismissed Cimino's masterfully operatic vision of a crime-ridden New York Chinatown. This prompted Rourke, who received his first featured role in *Heaven's Gate*, to support Cimino by refusing interviews to those who had attacked the director's work. A protest by the Asian community further bathed the film in notoriety and caused the studio to slap a disclaimer on it. Yet, as this laserdisc attests, Cimino has earned a place as one of the great craftsmen of American cinema.

—Bruce Lawton



Leonard Bernstein

The Art of Conducting: Great Conductors of the Past

1994. B&W/color. Leonard Bernstein, Herbert Von Karajan, Leopold Stokowski, Arturo Toscanini. Digital mono/stereo. (NR) 117 min. 2 sides CLV \$34.95. VHS also available. Teldec.

This BBC documentary looks closely at various approaches to conducting and music, from superb technicians such as Fritz Busch, to visionaries like Leonard Bernstein and Arturo Toscanini to mystics like Wilhelm Furtwangler. The performance footage, with segments like Felix Weingartner and Busch conducting overtures by Weber and Wagner in the '30s, is eye-popping. The period interviews with conductors like Beecham, Walter and Szell alternate with new commentary by Isaac Stern and John Eliot Gardner, among others.

The video reveals a dazzling array of philosophies and personalities, some literally spellbinding. Watching Furtwangler is like getting too close to

a hypnotist. I only wish that complete versions of the Szell, Reiner, Stokowski and Beecham performances excerpted here will soon be released. Otherwise, it's a pleasure to put this video on, sit back and learn. The film-to-video transfers are nearly flawless, and the sound, even from the 1930s material, is rich and fully detailed. When I finished watching, I wanted to stand up and shout, "Bravo!" It's that good.

—Bruce Eder

United Artists Sci-Fi Matinee

1951-58. *The Man From Planet X*: Robert Clarke, Margaret Field; dir. Edgar G. Ulmer. *Red Planet Mars*: Peter Graves, Herbert Berghoff; dir. Harry Horner. *The Monster That Challenged the World*: Audrey Dalton, Hans Conried; dir. Arnold Laven. *It! The Terror From Beyond Space*: Marshall Thompson, Ray "Crash" Corrigan; dir. Edward L. Cahn. Digital mono. (NR) 312 min. 6 sides CLV \$99.95. MGM/UA.

This triple-disc box set contains four of the most well-liked, albeit low-rent, sci-fi thrillers from United Artists' 1950s catalog. *Red Planet Mars* is the most fascinating of the four, an Eisenhower-era parable about a husband-and-wife scientific team who make contact with Mars and receive as answers to their questions the Sermon on the Mount. A religious revival sweeps the world. Only then do they discover that the real source of the messages is a vengeful ex-Nazi (Berghoff) who plans to bring civilization crashing down. As a grim fantasy of the religious millennium, it's a corker.

It! The Terror From Beyond Space was the inspiration for *Alien*, but it has none of the latter's style, just a lot of raw tension and as much low-keyed sincerity as the actors could muster in front of cheap sets during a 10-day shooting schedule. There are some good moments and Ray Corrigan looks menacing in the monster suit, but the film works best for those who grew up on it.

The giant slug-like creatures of *The Monster that Challenged the World* only challenge part of California, but there are some entertaining chills. Edgar Ulmer's *The Man From Planet X*, by contrast, is a genuinely atmospheric



Reed Warrior: Cosmetically challenged alien from UA.

thriller about an alien landing on an island off the coast of Scotland. It's well made, despite a silly-looking alien, and benefits from an intelligent script and a dedicated cast.

The film-to-video transfers are uniformly clean, with contrast and sharpness superior to recent theatrical showings, and very well-defined sound. MGM/UA might've included more informative notes, but otherwise it's hard to fault this set, except perhaps for the lack of trailers for all the films except *It!*

—BE

INTERACTIVE

Sports Illustrated Multimedia Almanac, 1995 Edition

1995. Hybrid CD-ROM for both Macintosh and Windows. \$49.95.

Media Gallery

DECEMBER 6, 1993

Bart Yale wants to bring shootfighting to the U.S.

Baseball players and owners have little reason to celebrate.

Before Bill Russell, no one had blocked shots in the pros or forced teams out of their offensive patterns.

Before Magic, Larry, and Michael there was just one basketball superstar: Dr. J.

Bettman suspended Keenan and left him with the Blues but without Nedved.

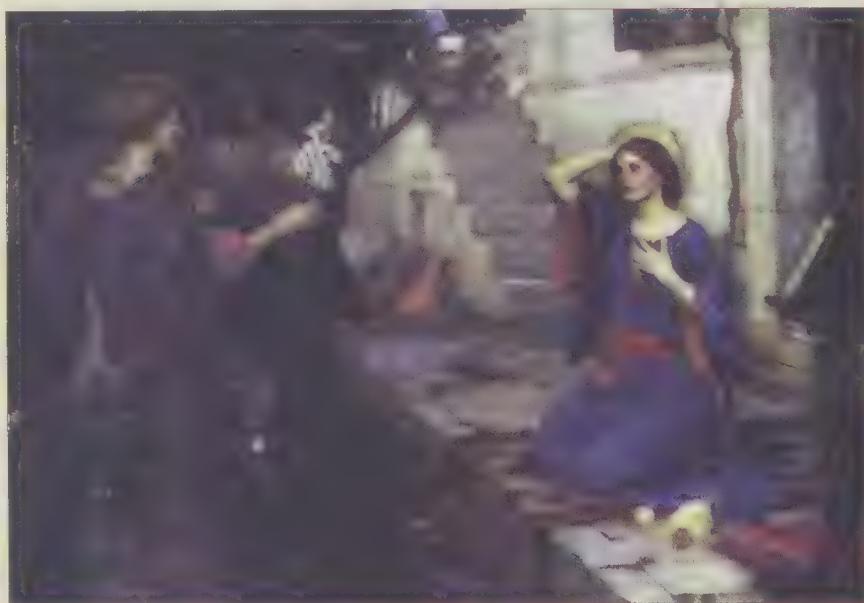
Big Daddy Wilkinson is everyone's big number one pick

Starpress Multimedia.

It was only a few years ago that reference works still meant huge, text-heavy volumes you weren't allowed to take out of the library, as if anyone really wanted to. Thanks to carefully produced CD-ROMs like the 1995 *Sports Illustrated Multimedia Almanac*, reference works now encompass splashy graphics, catchy music and exciting videos. This disc is a fun, even relaxing way to relive the year's events in the never-a-dull-moment worlds of professional and college sports.

And what an unforgettable year it was. Covering the period from October '93 to November '94, the Almanac features material on the '94 Winter Olympics (remember Tonya and Nancy?), the first World Cup Soccer tournament played on American soil, the excruciating baseball strike, O.J. Simpson's murder trial and much more. Topics range from tennis to horse racing, complete with statistics and insightful commentary. You even get a complete year's worth of *Sports Illustrated* on the disc, where it takes up little shelf space. And the graphical interface is a pleasure to use. All things considered, the Almanac is a rarity among CD-ROMs: a must-own disc.

—Ken Korman



Angelic Conversations: John William Waterhouse's *The Annunciation* (1914), from *Angels*.

Angels: The Mysterious Messengers

1994. Hybrid CD-ROM for Macintosh and Windows. \$49.95. *LIVE Interactive*.

I loaded this disc not believing in angels. By the time I finished with it, I was still a skeptic, but a skeptic amazed by the prevalence of angels in every culture throughout recorded history.

Did you know that one in ten pop songs mentions angels? Sift through this overstuffed CD-ROM and you will, because if you want to learn about heavenly winged creatures, this disc is the place to be. There's music, literature and film angelographies, a collection of luminous paintings and endless clips from a TV documentary. You'll see talking-head testimony from experts, an AIDS patient, an ex-cokehead and an overworked exorcist, a series of lame interactive meditation exercises to "get in contact with your own angels," lists of groups and meetings, and a 1-800 angel gift shop.

Though immensely informative, this disc is loaded with the same ethereal music and knowing breathy voiceover that blankets TV exposés of UFOs. Those not of the New Age may find it not only decreases credulity, but irritates.

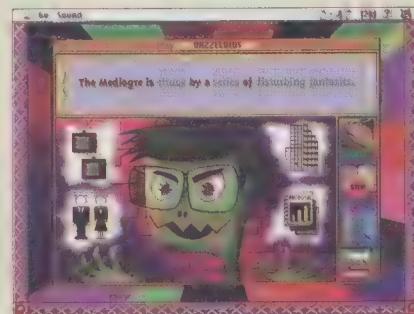
The paintings, however, are supremely divine. —**Josef Krebs**

Dazzleoids

1994. Hybrid CD-ROM for Macintosh and Windows. \$39.95. *Voyager*.

CD-ROMs for young children usually fall somewhere between bland and blander. Parents want them to be educational, but if they're not fun, junior's back to the Segundo box. How do you serve something nutritious without too much sugar?

Dazzleoids tries to entertain, as well as teach, by throwing a bit of edginess into the storytelling. The Dazzleoids are four animated characters who jump into several ambitious missions. In one, they're off to save a TV-addicted boy from becoming a brainwashed zombie (their words, not mine). In another, they try to save a pet shop, along with all the other "interesting and cute"



Razzle Dazzle: Vocabulary builder with attitude.

buildings in town from the nefarious plans of an evil banker, who wants to turn them into glass skyscrapers and turn all the toys and games into business marketing proposals.

Kids will definitely build their vocabulary from this exceptionally well-produced disc. The story doesn't talk down to them and they can click on the bigger words to get a spoken definition. But they'll also get a social viewpoint, like it or not. Now that there are rumblings to tear down public television and all the other "propaganda machines for the liberal elite," cultural conservatives can start wringing their hands over multimedia. Especially titles like this one.

—**Ron Goldberg**



Assault on Precinct 13

1976. Austin Stoker, Darwin Jostin; dir. John Carpenter. Mono, letterboxed. (R) 90 min. CLV 2 sides \$39.95. *Image Entertainment*.

Easily one of Carpenter's finest films, *Assault on Precinct 13* has never received the attention it deserves. Hopefully *Image Entertainment* can help rectify the situation with this special widescreen edition, narrated by the director.

The plot of *Assault on Precinct 13* concerns revenge. Members of a Los Angeles gang are killed in ambush by the police, and the surviving members begin a murder spree that climaxes with an attack on a police station that's closing down and is occupied by only a skeleton crew. Carpenter, in a surprisingly free flowing narration, acknowledges his debt to the westerns of John Ford and Howard Hawks, and re-counts various mistakes and moments of inspiration during the low-budget shoot. His talk is engaging and enlightening, and should be required listening for anyone who has ever considered directing a movie.

The disc looks astonishingly good, despite some occasional oversaturation of the reds. Considering that preservation was the last thing on the minds of its makers, *Assault* has survived well, and as a Panavision movie, its letterboxed transfer will be a revelation to those who have only seen it on TV or in bad 16mm prints. To get an idea of what this disc might have looked like, check out the trailer that appears at the end. —**BE**

HIGHLIGHTS

Terminal Velocity

1994. Charlie Sheen, Nastassja Kinski; dir. Deran Sarafian. "It's not the fall that kills you," it's the plot. Skydiving instructor gets chute tangled with "a beautiful and mysterious woman" played by "sexy and alluring" (both!) Nastassja who is, secretly, a KGB spy. Stereo. (PG-13) 102 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. Hollywood Pictures.

The Advocate

1993. Donald Pleasence, Ian Holm; dir. Leslie Megohey. An enlightened advocate in late Medieval France comes up against the joint rule of State and Church in trying to defend a client and bring law to the superstitious peasants. Surround. (R) 101 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. Miramax.

Ball of Fire/A Song is Born

1941/1948. B&W. Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck, Danny Kaye, Virginia Mayo, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, and Tommy Dorsey; dir. Howard Hawks, scr. Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett (Fire). In *Ball of Fire*, inspired by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Hawks turns his usual subject of a female intruding on a closed male world on its head by making the woman tougher than the guys. *A Song is Born*, his musical remake, has its moments, like the drum solo with matches, but is not equal to his classic comedy. Mono. (NR) 224 min. LD \$79.98. Pioneer.

Artistry: The Business of Art

1995. Hosted by Todd Bingham. Much-needed series dealing with all aspects of the unpleasant but necessary part of being an artist—making a living at it. Each of the 11 half-hour episodes covers a different aspect of the business, and consists of discussions with



Leaps of Faith: Nastassja Kinski (top) in search of her *Terminal Velocity*.

working professionals sharing must-know info usually only learned through painful experience.

Topics include agents, art law, the critic, graphic artists, art in public places, cartooning, fine art printing, marketing, framing/shiping and publishing. Mono. (NR) 28 min. each episode. \$199.95 set, \$29.95 each. Craven Home Videos (818-562-1739).

A Night to Remember, Criterion Edition

1958. B&W. Kenneth More, Honor Blackman, David McCullum; dir. Roy Ward Baker. Memorable British documentary-style account of the Titanic's maiden and last voyage, which ends with the gentlemen, having given the limited lifeboat seats to women and

children, going down with the ship while singing a chorus of "Nearer my God to...blub blub blub. Includes one hour making-of doco. Mono. (NR) 119 min. VHS \$19.98. LD \$99.95. Criterion/Image.

Dario Caro (Dear Diary)

1994. Nanni Moretti; dir. Moretti. Italian comedy in three vignettes about a filmmaker searching for the meaning of life on a motorcycle. Winner of Best Director Award at Cannes. Surround, subtitled. (NR) 100 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line/Image.

Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee

1994. Irene Bedard, August Schellenberg, Floyd Red Crow Westerman, Tantoo Cardinal; dir. Frank Pierson. True story based on the 1973 uprising in which 2,000 Native Americans stood up to the forces of the U.S. government. Stereo. (NR) 113 min. VHS priced for rental. Turner.

The Mole in Town**The Mole and the Green Star**

1957. Dir. Zdenek Miler. The world-famous award-winning children's series *The Mole* finally makes it to American video following a tribute night at the Chicago International Film Festival that included a Lifetime Achievement Award for Miler. Music by the Czech Symphony Orchestra. Mono. (NR) 30 min. per episode. VHS \$14.95 each. Kid Start.

National Lampoon's Attack of the 5'2" Women

1994. Julie Brown; dir. Brown. Includes "Tonya: The Battle of Wounded Knee" and "He Never Gave Me an Orgasm: The Leonora Babbitt Story". Stereo. (R) 82 min. VHS priced for rental. Paramount.

continued on page 104

Labels For Less

5,000 Fingers of Dr. T



This month's low-priced releases offer the opportunity to explore the way cinema deals with that strange enigma called the family. The traditional representation, as found in *Coneheads* (\$14.95 from Paramount), has lately been supplemented with family values that reflect the diversity found in single-parent and child-free families. Leaders of the pack include *Torch Song Trilogy*, *I'll Do Anything*, *My Girl 2*, *Indochine*, *Josh and S.A.M.* and *Look Who's Talking Now*, \$19.95 each, and *5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*, *My Girl*, *Bingo* and *Casey's Shadow*, \$14.95 each, all from Columbia TriStar; *King of the Hill* and *The Real McCoy*, \$19.98 each and *The Sugarland Express*, \$14.95, all from MCA/Universal; *A Bronx Tale* and *Shadowlands*, \$19.98 each, from HBO; *The James Dean* three-pack of *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Forever James Dean*, \$59.92 and *Little Dorrit*, \$29.98, both from Warner; *Searching for Bobby Fischer* and *The Family Jewels*, \$14.95 each from Paramount.

—JK

By Josef Krebs

SMALL DISH

continued from page 48

VH1, Nickelodeon, Nick at Night, Comedy Central, Lifetime and All News. But about 55 percent of subscribers have been opting for the all-inclusive \$34.98 package with umpteen (okay, 14) name brand movie channels and more. Roughly 98 percent of DSS customers buy the most complete \$29.95 Total Choice package of DirecTV offerings, which merge cable regulars with a seven-channel array of special taste movie channels, two Disney channels and the 28-channel Music Choice digital radio service.

SPORTS AND MORE SPORTS

Sports fans have been embracing DirecTV's more-is-better techno-logic for the eight regional sports channels available for \$80 a year as DirecTV Sports Choice. Also scoring well are the recently added NFL Sunday Ticket, at \$139 for the 1995 regular season package; NBA League Pass, at \$149; and NHL Center Ice, at \$59 for this year's partial season and \$149 for the next full season of 400 games. These customized season tickets let subscribers cherry pick from virtually every game that's played. The ESPN/ABC Sports College Football package will be available next season at \$9.95 per Saturday. A baseball package is in the offing. Also newly available on an *à la carte* basis is the 24-hour Golf Channel at \$6.95 a month.

Also setting the DirecTV's service apart is 55 pay-per-view movie channels, compared to three or four on cable and 10 on Primestar. The channels have been attracting "better than twice the number of expected buys per household," Hartenstein says. The norm for cable systems with pay-per-view offerings is a paltry 1.5 or two impulse buys per month. Our informal poll of DSS viewers conducted on CompuServe found a few who don't buy any pay-per-view movies. But those who do watch five or six movies a month at \$2.99 a flick. "A buck less than I pay at my local video store," enthused one poll participant, and \$1 to \$3 less than cable and Primestar charges for a flick. Primestar's pay-per-view rate is 2.5 a month.

Despite cries from some customers for "un-bundling channels I'll never watch," neither DirecTV nor USSB plans to split its program pie into smaller pieces, though DirecTV has introduced a less costly (\$14.95) DirecTV package exclusively for subscribers in the domain of the National Rural Telecommunications Co-

operative. (NRTC also wanted to repack some of USSB's prime pickings, specifically HBO, and even appealed the issue, with support from DirecTV, to the Federal Communications Commission. But the FCC said no, asserting that USSB was entitled to maintain program exclusives in the satellite orbit position it shares with DirecTV.)

While DSS performance surpasses over-the-air and cable reception, there is some degree of variability in picture quality. Pictures being dished on movie channels are sometimes a bit soft. The vast majority of viewers are delighted by the DSS picture and say their TVs, especially big screens, have never looked so good. Still, some sports fans have been surprised by the appearance of digital artifacts in an occasional blur of fast moving bodies, and a few viewers report a lip synching effect in which mouths move slightly ahead of the soundtrack.

When pressed, DSS spokesmen suggest that poor origination signals or prints can be the cause of a less than perfect picture. "If the channel source isn't sending a strong sync pulse for the receiver to lock onto, pictures and sound can get uncoordinated, since the picture does arrive first," says Thomson's Mike O'Hara. Pay-per-view movies look best "because we originate those channels and use digital master tapes," says Hartenstein.

The fear of rain blackouts on DSS, a heavy threat in cable's propaganda campaign, although cable itself is hardly immune to storm-induced interruptions, has proven even less of a problem than DSS anticipated. "I live on the central California coast and let me tell you it has been raining big time," related DSS subscriber Paul Ogren in an online testimonial. "My signal strength [as metered on DSS] has gone from 86 to 65 percent with no video or audio degradation. I would have to conclude from this that it really isn't a problem."

Nevertheless, DSS executives say they will soon deliver "even better" video quality to subscribers, perhaps before summer rolls around, thanks to two significant technical improvements. Most important, the standard for data coding and compression is being upgraded from MPEG I to the more robust, sophisticated MPEG II. The change involves installing a mountain of new circuit boards at the DirecTV and USSB head ends, then downloading some new software to each (MPEG II-ready) home receiver. But subscribers won't even notice the process. It's built in automatic.

Also changing is the way DSS assigns data compression rates to indi-

vidual programs or channels. From day one, program suppliers have set variable signal bit rates, compressing the feed more on movie channels where there is theoretically less screen movement, in order to squeeze the most channels onto the service. Now they're evolving to "statistical multiplexing," a more democratic, dynamic process that constantly adjusts the compression of each channel, relative to all the others, to meet the program needs of the moment.

The technical changes won't just mean better pictures, but more channels. Without adding any more satellite transponders, USSB is "talking about expanding from 21 to as many as 30 channels," says Blum. DirecTV, meanwhile, will easily have several dozen new channel slots to play with, between the technical upgrades and a third satellite that parent company Hughes expects to launch by summer on an Ariane space rocket; that is, barring any more Ariane disasters. The French concern had two launch failures last year, which delayed Hughes' third bird, among others, by at least six months.

What will the suppliers do with all those new channels? For starters, USSB hopes to soon launch one or two free DSS channels, a relatively easy task given parent company Hubbard Broadcasting's long experience in commercial television. (The operation runs nine TV stations, co-owns the All News Channel carried on USSB, and has a mobile video operation called F&F Productions that shoots everything from NFL games to the hot rod races packaged by Hubbard's Diamond P Sports.)

Blum is also excited by the possibility of adding Robert Redford's newly announced Sundance channel for alternative films, to be marketed by Showtime. And he talks about developing special niche programs, which he calls "mini-mass," for USSB. Isn't this a contradiction in terms? "Conceptually, what you're doing is going out and trying to define an audience of a certain size," explains Blum. "In broadcast or cable, your first cut is always geographic. It's limited by the territory you cover. But because we're national, we can pick any demographic criteria as our first cut. Take opera fans, for example. Let's say there are a million opera lovers sprinkled among 200 TV markets. That's 5,000 per market, on average, which is hardly enough for a TV station, public or private, to pay attention to. It's even tougher if they're sprinkled among 10,000 cable systems. But if we can get to each opera fan with our single signal, and convince them all to pay \$10 a month to USSB, that's \$10 mil-

continued on p.78

HOME THEATER

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Primestar Worry-Free Digital DBS



PRIMESTAR is the nation's premiere digital direct-to-home satellite (DBS) television pro-

gramming service and was the first to offer its subscribers the benefits of full-digital audio/video

broadcast television. Subscribers across the continental United States enjoy Primestar's one-stop, worry-free service that includes both state-of-the-art mini-dish digital satellite equipment as well as a wide variety of entertainment programming. And the monthly cost for both the Primestar digital DBS system and programming starts at around a dollar a day.

Primestar is the ideal mini-dish DBS choice for

consumers who want the benefits of digital satellite television, including enhanced picture quality, CD-like quality sound, and a wide variety of entertainment and informational programming, without any obligation to purchase expensive equipment. Primestar subscribers are also protected from hardware obsolescence.

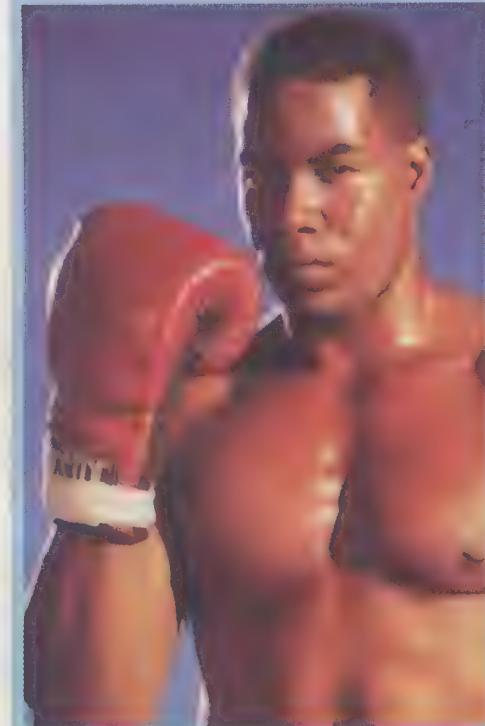
Primestar recently expanded its service to more than 80 channels of

USSB SATELLITE PROGRAMMING SERVICE

DSS is the system, USSB is the service. Together they bring a whole new way of viewing television right into your living room. With USSB, you get handpicked networks that are not only extremely popular, but that also offer a spectrum of programming for an entire family.

USSB provides quality programming for any TV lover. It offers Multichannel HBO (five channels), Multichannel Showtime (three channels) and FLIX, Multichannel The Movie Channel (two channels), and Multichannel Cinemax, as well as Lifetime, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon/Nick At Nite, MTV, VH1, and All News Channel. The packages range from \$7.95 to \$34.95 per month and are available through DSS. With USSB and complementary DSS programming from DirecTV, viewers have more than 150 channels to watch on DSS.

There are plenty of Hollywood hits to watch on USSB, and now, when you first sign up with USSB, you are automatically entitled to a free month of USSB Entertainment Plus programming. It's a \$34.95 value of quality entertainment, information, and movies! From comedy to drama, USSB offers entertainment for everyone. For more information, contact USSB at 1-800-BETTER-TV.



The tumultuous life story of World Heavyweight Champion Mike Tyson comes to life in full-digital splendor on an original Multichannel HBO movie on USSB in April.

Yamaha Home Theater

entertainment, including top-rated networks, round-the-clock sports, family programming, CD-like quality audio programming, and theatrical motion pictures. Over the next year, the service will further expand its capacity to up to 200 channels when its new, higher powered satellites are launched commencing in early 1996.

In addition to its extensive entertainment and music programming services, Primestar also offers more than 400 hours of sports programming per week, making it the only place to go for fans of every sport. The 15 regional basic tier sports channels have recently been joined by the premium "NBA League Pass," which gives subscribers the ability to create personalized packages from any given night's available games, and the "NHL Center Ice," which gives viewers access to up to 200 games during the 1995 regular season.

For more information about Primestar's variety of high quality programming and its worry-free service, call 1-800-PRIMESTAR.

WHEN IT COMES to home theater sound, Yamaha provides the best there is — in every price range. The company offers a complete line of processor/amplifiers and A/V receivers. All feature Digital Dolby Pro Logic and Yamaha's Cinema DSP for the most dramatic re-creation of the movie theater experience possible in the home.

In addition, all Yamaha A/V processors and receivers incorporate Yamaha's Digital Sound Field Processing to accurately re-create the acoustic ambiance of movie theaters, concert halls, jazz clubs, and athletic arenas. They are designed for both movie and music enjoyment.

With five processor/amplifiers ranging in price from \$700 and \$2,000 and led by its flagship DSP-A2070, the Yamaha line provides superb performance whether the choice is a full-bore 7-channel model,

a 5-channel model, or one of the add-on units for 5- or 7-channel systems. The acclaimed DSP-A2070 was hailed by *VIDEO*'s editors as "...the best integrated (combining processor and amplifiers) A/V component ever created." And *Audio*, too, honored the unit, calling it, "Simply the best!"

Yamaha's home theater receiver line of six models ranges in price from \$400 to \$1,500, and is headlined by the recently introduced RX-V2090, the company's first 7-channel A/V receiver. In addition to Digital Dolby Pro Logic, the flagship is AC-3 ready. The other receivers in the line are 5-channel models, and all incorporate Digital Dolby Pro Logic, Cinema DSP, and a variety of sound field programs and settings. Regardless of which model you choose, you get Yamaha's top-tier technology and performance. In fact, the company's least expensive model was recently

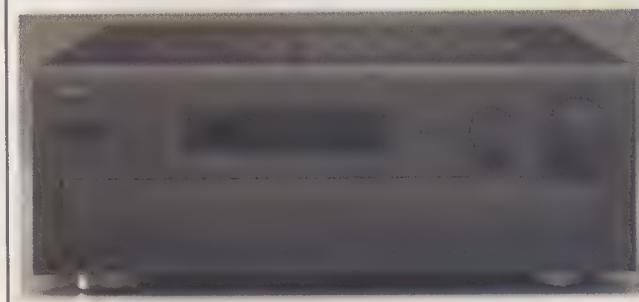


ranked first in *Sound & Image* magazine's survey of 12 budget models — some costing a good bit more.

Yamaha's line of powered subwoofers is also known for delivering accurate low bass along with dollar value. The company has also just introduced its first six-speaker home theater ensemble, complete with high-quality subwoofer, for an affordable \$400.

To get the most excitement and enjoyment from the sound of home theater, Yamaha has the components that bring movies to life and music to your ears.

For more information, call Yamaha at 1-800-4-YAMAHA.



RCA's Digital Satellite System

YOU KNOW the name, you know the mascots. The RCA brand, along with Nipper and Chipper, continue to provide consumers with an exciting line of home theater products. From projection TVs and VLS models to Hi-Fi VCRs and the amazing new RCA Digital Satellite System, RCA Brand Consumer Electronics answers the consumer demand for easier operation and high-quality products to fulfill their entertainment needs.

With RCA, you'll find a full line of televisions, VCRs, A/V receivers, and camcorders, as well as personal and portable

audio products. RCA Home Theatre™ Direct View TVs are an industry leader in performance, convenience, and styling. Screen sizes ranging from 31" to 35" in table model and fine-furniture console designs complement any consumer's entertainment and design needs.

The RCA Slimline projection televisions give you a bigger picture without taking up a big space. You can fit these TVs practically anywhere, without having to rearrange the entire room.

The RCA line of VCRs includes features such as built-in VCR Plus+ Pro-



gramming, Cable Box Control, on-screen programming, and more easy-to-use features. For playback, recording, and editing, RCA VCRs do the job.

Camcorders are becoming part of the everyday home theater system. Whether it's used professionally or leisurely, these camcorders have all the functions necessary for shooting great video. They come in VHS, 8mm, and VHS-C formats with plenty of performance

and convenience features, such as color viewfinder, Random Assemble Edit, titler, automatic head cleaner, and much more.

Topping off the RCA line of home theater products is the incredible RCA Digital Satellite System (DSS™). It's the 100 percent digital direct satellite system that brings extraordinary quality broadcast images and CD-quality sound capability directly into your living room via a small 18" satellite dish. You can choose from over 150 channels of programming from DirecTV™ and USSB™. Enjoy out-of-market pro and collegiate sports, movies, your favorite entertainment networks, pay-per-view, and much, much more.

For more information on RCA products, call 1-800-336-1900. For more information on DirecTV Programming, call 1-800-347-3288. For more information on USSB Programming, call 1-800-204-8772.



JVC HR-S7100U SVHS VCR

WHETHER YOUR home theater is large or small, you most likely have a VCR. Playback of your favorite videos is what



constitutes "home theater" and also what saves you lots of money in going to the movies. You want the best sound and clearest picture, and what better than an S-VHS VCR to add to the ambiance of the big screen.

JVC's HR-S7100U S-VHS VCR is overloaded with special features that puts it at the top of JVC's line of home video components. To start, it has front-panel buttons that are neatly arranged for easy operation, and with an illuminated remote control, you can bring that movie theater feeling right into your living room without turning on a light. Both the remote control and the VCR have a jog/shuttle dial, making rewinding and fast-forwarding more convenient.

Besides the basic trans-

port functions, some advanced functions on the 7100 are Random Assemble Edit, Cable Box Control, VCR Plus+, Family

function of the Hyper-Bass sound that boosts lower frequency on videotape, making Hi-Fi VHS movies sound more dynamic. So

you get the great movie theater sound you love from your S-VHS VCR.

Random Assemble Edit makes it easier to

create edited videos when your VCR is used as the source player in combination with another VCR. You can pre-pro-

gram up to eight scenes for automatic editing, putting together your most interesting scenes. This VCR is so smart, it knows to instantly rewind when done playing a tape, and you can program it to automatically start playback with the Next Function Memory.

For the most in video playback and plenty of features to use during editing, the HR-S7100 is your machine. For more information, contact JVC at 1-800-252-5722.

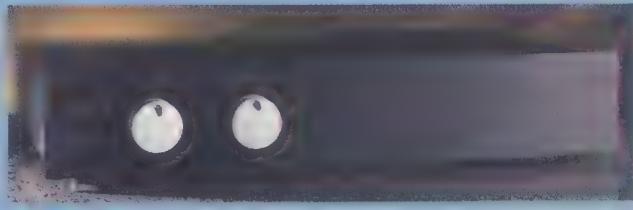
MONDIAL DESIGN'S ACT 1

Home theaters are supposed to be customized to fit certain lifestyles and room specifications. At Mondial Designs, they know how important having a quality, high-performance home theater system is.

That's why they have the American Custom Theater I (ACT-I). It is a Dolby Pro-Logic surround sound processor that anyone in the family can use. Two machined aluminum knobs are the only controls that reside on the ACT I front panel and provide access to all the settings you need. But for total control, a full-featured remote is provided, and with on-screen programming, you won't miss a beat. The ACT I has a frequency response in the front channels of 18-20,000 Hz; a subwoofer output with or without crossover of 100 Hz; and three audio and three video inputs. The audio and video stages are engineered on separate circuit boards to prevent their individual signals from interfering with each other.

The video section contains both composite and S-video inputs, allowing for recording one source while viewing another. For further support Mondial will assist their dealers in custom designing a system.

Enjoy the thrill of the movies right in the comfort of your own home. For more information, call Mondial Designs Limited at 914-693-8008.



Brookline Tech Volume Stabilizers



YOU KNOW when you're watching a movie and an action scene comes on the screen and blows you out of your chair? The volume difference is so annoying at times that you have to turn down the volume just until the scene passes, missing the ambiance of the film. The same goes for television. Regardless if the commercial is too loud or too quiet, you always wind

up adjusting the volume.

Brookline Technologies understands. That's why they've developed a family of Volume Stabilizers™ with Enhanced Sound Circuitry that makes viewing any video a complete audio joy.

Their models include the VS201E, VS301E, VS311E, and the new VS401E. They conveniently control the sound level with an extremely natural

and transparent sound. And with the Enhanced Sound Circuitry, the stabilizers respond like a human ear to make listening to movies and television much more tolerable.

Their newest model, the VS401E, combines five products into one: digitally controlled, it can compress or expand audio to fit your needs; it has a four-input A/V switcher to simplify installation; it is digital ambient to automatically compensate for background noise; there is a noise gate/downward

expander to eliminate source noise; and a peak limiter keeps peaks (like commercials) in line. This model has been designed for the mid-to-high-end home theater/audio system.

The units are easy to install and just as easy to use, and will work with Dolby Surround sound systems. The 401 can be rack mounted while the other three units are about the same size as a portable CD player and will fit into any system. You will be amazed at the difference a volume stabilizer will make.

For information on Brookline Technologies and their products, call them at 1-800-366-9290.

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Laserdisc Fan Club, Inc. provides consumers with a wide spectrum of laserdiscs — enough to fill your whole library. And now for a limited time only, Laserdisc Fan Club is offering **VIDEO Magazine** readers a 20 percent discount off the suggested retail price on these great titles: *Forrest Gump, True Lies, The River Wild, Stargate, Time Cop, Clear and Present Danger, The Mask, Jurassic Park, The Shadow, The Client, The Specialist, Angels in the Outfield, Wolf, and Natural Born Killers.*

The offer expires on June 30, 1995. If none of these titles grab you, call for their free and informative monthly catalog, containing hundreds of new and recent releases — all at least 15 percent off the suggested retail price.

Laserdisc Fan Club also offers the best, if not the most simple shipping policy in the business: Only \$2.75 per order for Airborne Express 1-2 day service to most areas. Only \$2.75 no matter how many discs you order in the continental U.S. They are open on weekdays 7AM-6PM, Saturdays 8AM-5PM (Pacific Time).

Call Laserdisc Fan Club at 1-800-801-DISC (3472).



Ken Crane's LaserDisc SuperStore

Carrying every title available on laserdisc, Ken Crane's has the fastest availability on new titles. And through May 31, 1995, they will discount their titles by 20 percent! That's a big savings on some of the biggest titles in the history of movies.

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Ken Crane's has been in the audio/video business for over 40 years and has eight retail stores that specialize in all audio/video products. Laserdiscs have been an important part of their business and they have enjoyed tremendous success. Offering customers any title they want and providing free shipping has made Ken Crane's a leader in the laserdisc mail-order business. They accept Mastercard, Visa, Discover, AMEX, checks, and C.O.D.

For more information, contact Ken Crane's at 1-800-624-3078 or fax your order at 1-714-892-8369.

When you walk into Ken Crane's Laserdisc SuperStore, you walk into 8,000 square feet of laserdisc software that will blow your mind.

Lenmar's NoMEM Battery

CAMCORDER power management has taken another major step forward with the introduction of the Lenmar NoMEM RediCell battery.

When a nickel cadmium battery is recharged before it is fully drained, the battery "remembers" it is using less than a full charge, resulting in a loss of capacity. The Lenmar NoMEM RediCell battery has no memory, so it can be fully charged from any level, and it is fully compatible with your original camcorder charger, making it the perfect replacement battery.

The RediCell adds even another dimension to the popular NoMEM

line. Keeping a nickel cadmium battery "topped off" will reduce the capacity of the battery. The RediCell reacts just the opposite. Keeping a RediCell fully charged and ready to go actually extends the useful life of the battery.

The RediCell includes a separate AC trickle charger that plugs directly into the side of the battery, keeping it fully charged when you're ready to use it. The charger is much smaller than the bulky original charger, which makes it ideal for travel as well as at home.

The NoMEM RediCell is rated at 6 volt 2300mAh and uses gold

contacts to reduce resistance and increase camcorder runtime. The RediCell is Lenmar model JPS77CH with a suggested retail price of \$79.97 and is compatible with Sony, JVC, Panasonic, Sharp, and other models.

All Lenmar NoMEM batteries are guaranteed for life against loss of capacity due to memory. Additionally, all Lenmar products are warranted to be free from defective parts



and workmanship for one year.

For more information, contact Lenmar at 1-800-424-2703.

continued from page 70

lion a month to purchase and produce opera programs. For us, that's a real business."

What about starting a 16:9, widescreen movie channel, which DSS equipment is designed to receive? "We're looking forward to that, but right now the market isn't up to handling it," says Blum. Has USSB considered adding its own digital audio services, perhaps picking up Digital Music Express, the major rival of DSS' Music Choice? "There's a real potential for us to get into that," Blum said. "But we don't have anything in the pipeline to talk about."

INTERACTIVE OPTIONS

On the notion of adding interactive services to DSS, the DirecTV and USSB agree to disagree. "There's potential within the system, but I don't think there's much of a market for interactivity," Blum believes. "People don't come home and want to interact. They want to be entertained. In the last 150 years of home entertainment, we've moved from playing piano to the player piano, then to phonographs, then radio, then TV. You're going down a slope of less and less interactivity. We don't see concepts like choosing your own camera angles during a football game as a big item. It's a novelty and, after a little while, it's work."

Given its extra channels and development history with Thomson Consumer Electronics, DirecTV has to be looking "quite seriously" at the newly announced Open TV interactive television platform that Thomson and Sun Microsystems are developing for satellite, cable and telephone applications, Hartenstein allows. Not coincidentally, the Open TV set top box is built around what is essentially a DSS receiver. So this new application could be up and running on the satellite system in a matter of months.

In a preview at the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Thomson and Sun demonstrated Open TV's ability to deliver video-on-demand, interactive advertising and a system for purchasing concert tickets (after a viewer's appetite had been whetted with music videos). Open TV graphics are superimposed on standard programs to alert viewers that interactive content or applications are present. You then communicate back through the 1,200-baud modem built into every DSS system. Usually, the modem is used only for telling program suppliers what billable programs you watched during the previous month.

Also tugging at DirecTV's sleeves is software giant Microsoft. According to

the industry-watching *Satellite Business News*, Microsoft is negotiating to use transponders on DirecTV's third satellite to deliver to homes the recently announced Microsoft Network, its looming competitor to CompuServe, America On Line and Prodigy. DSS receivers already have data ports built-in—wideband on the basic model, wideband and low-speed on the upgraded version. Here, too, that 1,200-baud modem could be used as a return data loop for interactive services.

"We're looking at a variety of applications, from data downloading to portfolio tracking to data retrieval through a Nexus or Lexus kind of information system," says Hartenstein. "We think we have our arms around an operating system that can handle all the potential of interactive services. But the question is, what is the marketplace looking for? What will our subscribers consider an attractive application and, more important, how do we attract new subscribers through interactive capabilities?" Hartenstein says Hughes will "commit mid year," to an extended services strategy, "then get to work on it and announce much closer to the ready date—we're talking 1996 here."

The second-generation DSS hardware packages that are coming later this year from RCA are likely to be toned up for potential interactive demands with a somewhat faster modem, probably using a 2,400 baud rate.

MORE FUTURE FEATURES

Also being attended to is the lack of automatic channel switching capability on the first-generation receiver, which makes it impossible to program VCR recordings of shows appearing on different channels. While RCA won't give away details for competitive reasons, USSB's Blum says "my understanding is that the problem will be fixed" in second generation receivers "with a VCR Plus-style solution." Thomson also has a license for the onscreen guide and programming features of StarSight Telecast.

Some viewers have already discovered an alternative. Universal Electronics' VCR Pro 4 remote control can be programmed to switch on the DSS system, turn on the VCR, set the channel on the DSS and start recording. Note, however, that the operating manual for the remote leaves out essential information. "To set up for DSS, you must use the Device Mover to change CBL to SAT. Then at 'Device Setup' enter SAT code 566," suggests DSS user Mark Zimmer. Or call Universal at 800-883-4776, and have them talk you through the procedure.

A third improvement likely to show

up on second-generation RCA or first generation Sony models, if not both, is a UHF-signal transmitting remote control that allows one DSS receiver to feed TV sets in two or more rooms with channel switching capability at the remote locations. At the moment, RCA handles this type of situation with a two-piece Signal Sender system (\$60). One pyramid shaped module receives a DSS remote control's infrared signal, translates it into a UHF frequency, then zaps that through the walls to a second Signal Sender. It converts the signal back to infrared and shoots the beam across the room to the receiver. And, voila, you've changed the channel.

Or you can settle the multiroom installation issue with RCA's new DSM430RW package. It bundles a dual-output plastic satellite dish with two DSS receivers, a standard and a step-up model, in one box for \$1,499, a \$50 savings compared with buying the components separately.

Integrating DSS with other home theater products, is "a natural for Sony," hints Jim Palumbo. "If all our dealers are selling are DSS boxes, they're missing the point," he says. Already well versed in the ways of DBS, Sony served as the major system integrator for the broadcast facilities for both DirecTV and USSB.

Televisions with built-in DSS tuning capability have already been shown in prototype form by Thomson, and are a "good bet for '96," says O'Hara.

Other companies are also adding DSS products. Monster Cable offers a special DSS installation kit for do-it-yourselfers, and KVH Industries of Middletown, Rhode Island developed TracVision (\$7,995) to bring DSS reception to boats. The system stabilizes a small dish, enabling it to follow the DSS satellites despite the rolls and pitches of life on the seas.

Next year, we may also see new competition for DSS in the high-powered direct broadcast arena. EchoStar Communications, a DBS venture launched by C-band satellite pioneer Charlie Ergen, plans to launch its first satellite on a Chinese Long March rocket late this year. In addition, Primestar Partners plans to shift to two new high-powered satellites and replace all the equipment it's leased to customers. DirecTV and EchoStar are attempting to block the change by citing unfair competition. But if Primestar succeeds, it will upgrade from 69 to roughly 150 channels with MPEG II decoding and shrink its dishes from their current 36-inch diameter to a DSS-sized 18 inches.

With so much still to come, America's romance with small-dish TV may have only just begun. ■

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DIGITAL FEVER

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machine, at \$250 & \$200, respectively. Goldstar also said it would bundle two of the best 3DO games—*FIFA International Soccer* and *Shock Wave*, both from Electronic Arts and worth a total of \$130—free with its \$399 player, making GoldStar's 3DO the one to beat.

Philips Media announced several new titles for its extensive catalog of first-rate CD-i and CD-ROM software, including *Live Without Monty Python*, a sing-along collection of such classics as "Lumberjack Song," and *More Naughty Bits*, a best-of-Python that plays in four languages. Both CD-i-compatible Video CDs are \$24.98.

Philips beat out stiff competition when it showed the first two Audio VisionCD discs, which are essentially music CDs with CD-ROM partitions. The discs featured—2 Minutes Hate and Techno-Squid Eats Parliament—a pair of Little Rock, Arkansas alternative rock bands making their debuts. Listen to the discs, about \$18 each, on your CD sound system then pop them into your Macintosh for an interactive visit with each band. By summer, every major record label will be releasing music CDs with CD-ROM partitions. It's guaranteed to be the multimedia trend of '95.

Meanwhile hundreds of new conventional CD-ROM titles were on display. Packard Bell, the leading supplier of PC-compatible computers, showed a historic new line of CD-ROM software, historic because each of its six "Kidstory" titles are priced at \$19.95, while the average price for a CD-ROM is still \$50 to \$60. Simon and Schuster Interactive previewed two CD-ROMs base on the ever-popular *Star Trek* franchise. Available in June, *Star Trek Omnipedia* is a huge database of Trek materials that will be the first voice-activated reference tool. Fall will bring *Klingon Immersion Studies*, which is billed as "an interactive adventure in Klingon language, culture, lore and warfare." The discs are \$80 each.

Acclaim previewed *Alien Trilogy* for PC CD-ROM and Sega Saturn, featuring material from all three *Alien* movies. The player battles you-know-what in the Sigourney Weaver role of Ripley. Acclaim's *NBA Jam—Tournament Edition* updates one of the funnest video games ever with new players, dunks, and graphics. It will be released in six formats with prices from \$30 to \$75.

Spectrum Holobyte previewed *ClockWerx*, a new action puzzle game by Russian cult figure Alexey Pajitnov, the man who invented *Tetris*. A smiling, bearded Pajitnov was on hand at CES to show off his work and wonder aloud about Western notions of celebrity.

Turner Interactive previewed The Cartoon Network's *Toon Jam* CD-ROM, which lets kids create their own animated music videos. Putnam New Media's *Comic Creator* disc (\$35) contains all the tools required to build and print your own color comics. Finally, Activision showed the first volume of the Atari 2600 Action Pack (\$30), a series of four titles on PC CD-ROM or floppy disc, each containing 10 to 15 games originally made for the popular Atari 2600 game system of the early '80s. Are you ready for the first big wave of videogame nostalgia?

SCREENS OF ALL SIZES

There were TV sets aplenty, but front projectors stole the show with demos showing remarkable film-like picture quality. In the wow-department for picture-enhancing hardware, the winner had to be Faroudja's new VP400 line quadrupler. Created because Runcor's 900A projector has such a fine dot pitch that you can see scan lines even with Faroudja's line doubler, the quadrupler takes the line-doubled image and scans it twice as fast, at 62.8 kilohertz. But at \$20,000 the quadrupler is not twice as expensive as the \$15,000 doubler.

Just as impressive was the Linnaeum speaker room, where the Oregon-based company demonstrated its unique speakers with the assistance of a Runcor 900A video projector shooting from the rear straight at a Da-Lite 60-inch 16:9 screen. The effect was unique because Runcor's front projector was used in the manner of a rear projector, but without the mirror. The picture was amazingly clear, bright and well-colored.

Casio introduced an unusual portable projector that has a built-in 10-inch LCD monitor. If you fold the monitor down, the set can project an image up to 100-inches in size. The image is designed to fall on a collapsible screen included with the projector. The FV-600 Mega Vision is due in June for a price of \$1,950. Also in the cool department was a prototype 21-inch LCD monitor by Sharp that was about four inches deep. Director Steven Spielberg, who was cruising the booths with partners Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, inquired about buying one. But it's not yet available even to him.

In the real TV world, ProScan pulled out the stops with an 80-inch

rear-screen set that sports nine-inch CRT guns and a \$8,499 suggested price. Pioneer unveiled a new series of Cinema-Wide sets featuring new screen sizes of 46, 51 and 60 inches. The sets use a slightly wider than usual aspect ratio of 16:10.7. Also checking in with an interesting looking 60-inch set was Toshiba, which also showed TIMM, a 20-inch multimedia/TV monitor that will let game players and TV watchers feel equally at home for \$999.

Among "smaller" big-screens, ProScan introduced its first 32-inch direct-view set, and Panasonic displayed new 27-, 31- and 35-inch models. Magnavox has an intriguing new line of 27- to 52-inch TVs that include an eight-second "instant replay" feature for the sets' picture-in-picture insets. Before launching a new pair of 31- and 35-inch sets this fall, Proton will introduce 30- and 34-inch widescreen TVs this spring for suggested prices of \$2,700 and \$4,000. The 30-incher, the first in this size to make it to the U.S., will have four viewing modes, a three-way speaker system and two-tuner picture-in-picture.

VCRs

There were several attractive new VCRs at the show. Heading the list was Samsung's VR8905, a VHS model due this fall that has the StarSight program guide built into the VCR rather than into the TV. This arrangement offers the benefit of less complicated wiring if a user's signal source does not require a cable box. You'll still be able to use the guide through your TV to decide what to watch. Samsung also introduced a "worldwide" VCR, for a suggested \$1,999, that will record in any broadcast system and play back on any TV. It will act as a standards converter when tape is copied to another VCR. Zenith and Goldstar also announced they would have VCRs with StarSight.

Toshiba's new VCRs are also noteworthy. Its entire line now includes 19-micron EP heads and flying pre-amps, and all the VCRs are under \$600. The small EP heads read only the part of a video track with the current signal, excluding overlap from adjacent tracks to reduce noise in the picture. The flying pre-amps amplify a low-level signal within the VCR's head drum so that when the signals leave for further processing they are robust enough to reduce the effects of noise. Toshiba's top model, the M-781, for \$549, also offers luminance and chrominance digital noise reduction, while the M-761, for \$499, features color enhancement signal circuitry to improve sharpness while reducing color bleeding.

Aiwa's new HV-MX1 VCR should continue on page 92



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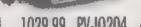
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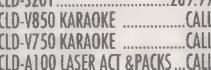
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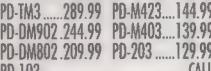
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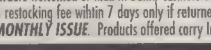
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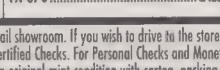
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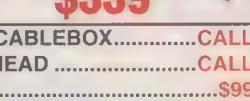
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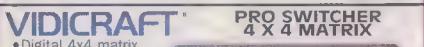
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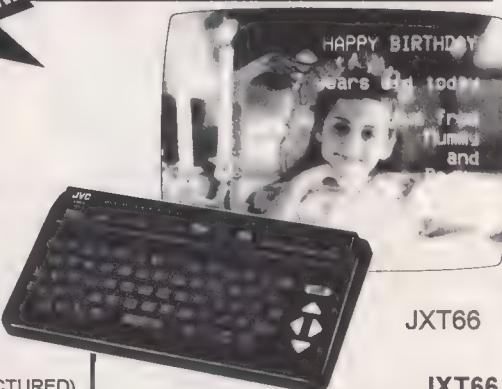
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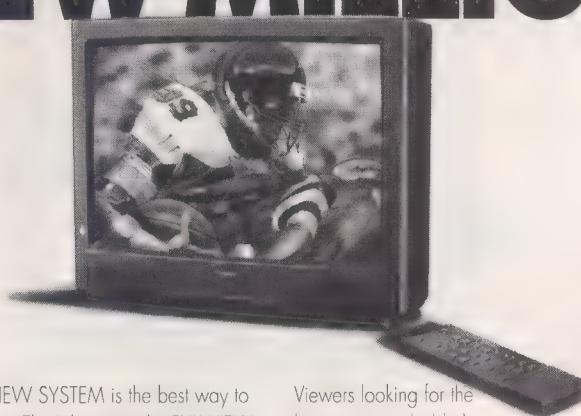
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GR-AX30
GR-AX37

Video Recorders

HR-J210
HR-J410
HR-J412
HR-J610
HR-VP612

Panasonic



AG-455

SVHS-1LUX-12X ZOOM



AG-1970

SVHS/VHS

AG-1290
CT-1384VY
AG-513A
AG-A96

AG-5700
CT-1383VW
AG-S20A
WJ-KBL15
WV-CG5P

RCA



8 mm Camcorders

Pro-809
Pro-843
Pro-845

VHS Camcorders

CC413
CC-600
CC-547

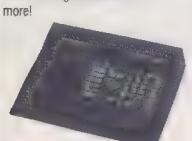
Video Recorders

VR-503
VR-507
VR-603
VR-674

Video Recorders

VR-721
VR-720HF
VR-800HF

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MX-1 Digital Video Mixer

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NV-55BX4 55" 16:9 Stereo Projection Television

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VL-E36
VLE-42U

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ES-70
ES-500
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ES-800

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CALL FOR PAL SYSTEMS	



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VM-E58A
 CALL



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 VM-E55A...CALL
 VM-E56A...CALL
 VM-E58A...CALL
 VM-H58A...CALL
 VM-H39A...CALL

VM-H57A...CALL
 VM-H59A...CALL
 VM-H71A...CALL
 VM-H70A...CALL
 VM-H70A...CALL
 VM-1700A...CALL
 VM-2700A...CALL
 VM-3700A...CALL

Panasonic

VHS-C



AG-455
 INDUSTRIAL PROFESSIONAL CAMCORDER

FULL SIZE VHS



PV-1060
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 PV-IQ244 569.99
 PV-IQ304 469.99
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WJ-MX50	CALL
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CT-1383Y	239.99
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RCA

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PRO 920 9MM	CALL

Nikon

NI-760	SAME AS TB-700, M-800, CC-600
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VIDEO

Reader Service Card

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number (with Area Code) _____

1. What size is your primary viewing TV?

20"-25" A 25"-27" B 27"-32" C 35"+ D

2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?

0-2 E 3-5 F 6-10 G

3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?

1 hour H 1 day I 1 week J No Planning K

4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?

Yes L No M

5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?

Daily Newspaper N Cable Guide O Weekly Newspaper Insert P

TV Guide Q Other R

6. How many programs do you tape per week?

1-5 S 5-7 T 7+ U

7. If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?

Yes V No W

8. Are you currently a subscriber to VIDEO?

Yes X No Y

Please circle product numbers to receive desired information

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
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166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Card expires 7/19/95. VM495

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
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91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105
106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135
136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150
151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165
166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195

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CCD-TR70	539.99	CCD-TR80	CALL
CCD-TR82	639.99	CCD-TR91	769.99
CCD-TR500	969.99	CCD-FX30	499.99
CCD-FX300	539.99	CCD-FX400	559.99
CCD-FX500	569.99	CCD-FX600	569.99
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 VM-E52A...CALL VM-H57A...CALL
 VM-E54A...CALL VM-H59A...CALL
 VM-E55A...CALL VM-H71A...CALL
 VM-E56A...CALL VM-H70A...CALL
 VM-E58A...CALL VM-1700A...CALL
 VM-H38A...CALL VM-2700A...CALL
 VM-H39A...CALL VM-3700A...CALL

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AG-5700	1189.99
AG-1970	1179.99
AG-1290	239.99
WJ-MX50	CALL
WJ-MX30	1769.99
WJ-AVE7	899.99
WJ-AVE5	779.99
AG-A96	349.99
CT-1383Y	239.99
CT-1384Y	CALL
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\$619.99

GR-AX25

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GR-AX30

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GR-AX35

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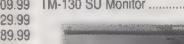
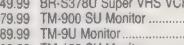
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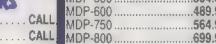
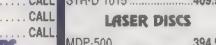
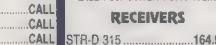
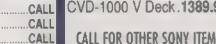
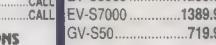
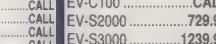
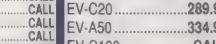
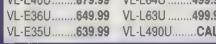
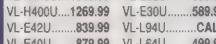
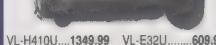
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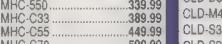
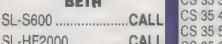
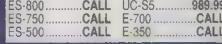
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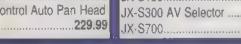
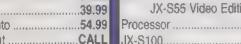
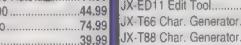
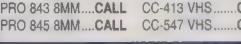
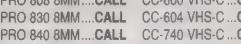
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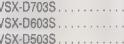
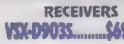
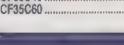
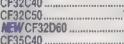
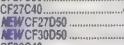
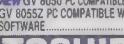
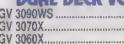
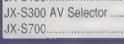
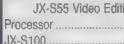
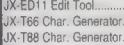
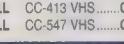
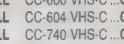
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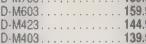
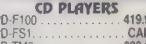
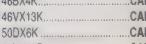
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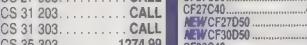
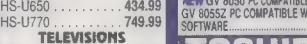
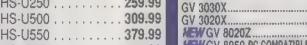
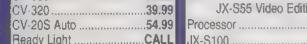
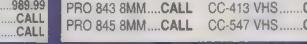
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When *Oklahoma!* was filmed in 1954, director Fred Zinnemann used two processes, 65mm Todd-AO and 35mm Cinema-Scope, shooting each scene in one format and then the other. Todd-AO was the superior method, largely because its film ran at 30 frames per second rather than the standard 24, providing a crisper, clearer image than Cinema-Scope.

Only now has the Todd-AO version become available on disc (the aspect ratio is 2.2:1). Seeing this version is like seeing a film that has been restored. Whether or not the music is to your taste, the disc is lovely to watch.

What were the criteria for my selections? Picture and sound quality certainly, but also value. For example, at the top of my list of laserdisc disappointments is the boxed collector's edition of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, even though assistant editor Josef Krebs found it to be "a fan's dream come true" in his review (Dec. '94). A personal favorite, the film received a good widescreen transfer. But, considering that Audrey Hepburn, George Peppard and Henry Mancini recently died, a greater effort could have been made to document their contributions.

We get a CD of the soundtrack, six murky lobby cards, a copy of the script with hard-to-read notes by Hepburn, and a few comments by her, Mancini, and director Blake Edwards about how wonderful it was to work on the movie. The source material, Truman Capote's charming novella, would have been welcome, as would an analog-track commentary by Edwards. The movie alone is available for \$40 less than the special edition's \$79.95 price. Seek it out.

Consider also the relative lack of value in the collector's edition of *Schindler's List* (\$139.98). The same THX CLV disc is available alone for \$49.98, which still seems too much, even though the film is superb. The additional \$90 buys a CD soundtrack, Thomas Keneally's novel, a pictorial booklet and a box to store them in.

Many of the best discs came out in the last months of 1994. Does this mean we're going to see an exponential increase in superior discs during 1995? So far, the signs are good. Special editions of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (see "Editor's Choice," this issue), *Cliffhanger* and John Woo's *Hard-Boiled* are available, and *The Wild Bunch*, which is arguably the most influential film in the last quarter century, is about to be released in this manner. Let's hope that more great movies receive the treatment they deserve.

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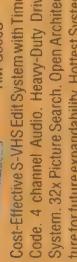
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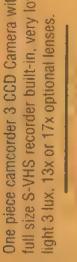
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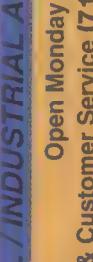
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FINE TUNE

continued from page 60

walls of the room and the corners formed by the intersection of the walls. This will help you avoid the selective frequency reinforcement that can occur when main channel speakers interact with a room.

An important distinction should be made between stereophonic and home theater speaker systems. Stereophonic speakers are designed with wide dispersion patterns, so that a single pair of loudspeakers can generate a soundfield that extends from the left wall to the right. In a movie theater, all front channel speakers are behind the screen, with each tracking only a segment of the onscreen action. As a result, speakers intended for home theater use usually have controlled dispersion patterns. Attempting to set up theater speakers as if they were typical stereo speakers will prove both frustrating and incorrect.

Left and right front-channel speakers should be situated within two feet of their respective sides of the video screen, and at least an inch or two ahead of the screen's front surface. Center-channel speakers should be as close to the television as possible. Since effects channel speakers are generally mounted on walls or the ceiling, a pair of tall (24 to 30 inch) stands can help avoid costly mistakes.

Place dipolar speakers at the sides of the listening position and aim the null point at or slightly behind, the listening position. This is the point on the speaker at which the back and front sound-

fields cancel each other out. Note which placement yields the most natural surround effect. For front-firing speakers, place speakers and stands along the rear wall and attach speakers to front channel amplifier outputs. To check them out, remain near the listening position, face the rear speakers, switch the system to "stereo-only" mode and play a recording of a solo voice. Adjust the speaker positions until the vocalist appears to sound equidistant from the left and right rear speakers. (This technique provides a delocalized surround effect, and is not appropriate for the new Dolby AC-3 system.)

BALANCING ACT

With a sound level meter (available at Radio Shack) set to "70 dB," begin a channel balance test. Adjust the front left and right speaker levels to 75 dB, then adjust the center and rear levels to within ± 1 dB of the main channel level. This procedure should produce a seamless, panoramic soundfield. To ensure proper front channel balance, play a movie sequence that contains left-to-right or right-to-left action. (Any of the torpedo sequences from *The Hunt for Red October* will suffice.) As the sound traverses the stage, ask yourself if it seems well integrated, or do any of the speakers call attention to themselves? If one speaker's output is prominent, toe it in slightly towards the listening position, or toe the opposite speaker out towards its adjacent side wall. Observe what effect these adjustments have on channel balance. Working in increments of six inches or less, move the speakers alternately closer to and farther from the video screen. Continue this process

until you achieve uniform volume intensity across the front channel soundfield.

If you follow these basic steps, you'll go a long way toward optimizing your home theater's sound system.

—Anthony Chiarella

TECH TIPS

Double protection

If you're annoyed by the pressure to purchase extended warranties when you buy equipment, there may be an alternative. If you have a credit card with a "purchase protection plan," you'll find that the card often doubles the warranty coverage offered by manufacturers. Most "gold cards" do this, as do a handful of standard cards. Check your credit card's benefits to know for sure.

Robert P. Serroni Jr.

Dennisport, Massachusetts
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Sticky wires

Next time you need to run a speaker wire around a door or along a baseboard, consider using a hot-glue gun rather than cable tacks or staples. The wires will be easy to install and easy to remove. Just pull the cables off. The glue will release in a snap and not harm painted or wood surfaces. I've used this method with surround cables for years. Just be sure the glue is not industrial strength, or you risk melting the cable casing.

Steve Windhorn
Tualatin, Oregon



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FORUM

continued from page 60

cannot equal the ACT I when music reproduction is a primary criterion. Overall, the ACT I represents a solid entry into the home theater market for Mondial.

SOUNDMAST SURROUND

The Soundmast surround system is New England Audio Resource's first dedicated home theater speaker package. A slender tower design that occupies less than a square foot of floor space, the Soundmast is the most attractive floor standing speaker NEAR has ever offered. More conventional in appearance, the 20M surround satellite and its video-shielded counterpart, the JIB, or 20MV, center channel, convey a sense of functional quality. The full system consists of the Soundmast speakers at \$1,299/pair, the JIB at \$499 and the 20M surrounds at \$899/pair.

Used as stereophonic loudspeakers, the Soundmasts provided a clear, transparent creation of musical events. Imaging and soundstaging were extremely fine, with the soundfield never calling attention to the location of the speakers. At low volumes, the Soundmasts produced enough deep, clean bass to eliminate the need for a subwoofer.

Of course, the Soundmasts are not perfect: no speakers are. Both the Soundmast towers and the JIB center speaker tended to curtail high treble information. Moreover, while flattering to female vocals, deep male voices (like Joss Ackland's in *The Hunt for Red October* or *Lethal Weapon 2*) and acoustic guitar bass lines excite low-level speaker resonances that add a subtle projection to the NEAR's output.

More significant is the compression of high-level dynamics that distinguish loud special-effects-laden movie soundtracks. When listening to music or movies like *The Piano*, which do not rely on high-energy action effects, the NEAR system offers a satisfying tonal balance, an expansive soundfield and ample dynamic range. But throw on an action blockbuster, and the NEAR's smooth, detailed presentation becomes compressed, giving it a flatter character until you back off the volume. The compression occurred at volume levels well within the range of the amplifier and the speaker. (Although the effect sounds similar, this is not amplifier clipping.)

The 20M is a fine speaker and a pair functioned well as rear-channel surrounds, conveying both frequency and spatial information with a natural ease. However, as rear channels the speakers seemed a com-

promise. Dipolar effects speakers are more effective and application-specific, and the models from Counterpoint (\$799/pair) and Energy RVSS (\$575/pair) provide a more enveloping surround environment. However, NEAR will have dipole surrounds by the time you read this.

Overall, the Soundmasts merit a strong recommendation within their dynamic range limitations. For those whose tastes favor music and low-volume movies, the Soundmasts are excellent \$1,299 speakers.

ALCHEMICAL CHANGES

Audio Alchemy's Digital Decoding Engine v1.1 is an audio product perfectly suited to the needs of video enthusiasts. It even transformed the sound quality of the \$2,500 Pioneer Elite CLD-97 laserdisc player with which we used it.

The set up was simple. We ran a digital coaxial cable from the CLD-97's digital output, with the audio output from the DDE running to the laserdisc audio input of the Proceed PAV, the Fosgate Model Four and the ACT I. We tried each processor in turn. The changes were immediately evident. Special effects became more dynamic and explosive, yet with an added sense of refinement and realism. Voices were smoother and more detailed. Background noise lessened, allowing the resolution of low-level information which had not previously been heard. And the soundfield generated by each processor expanded into the room when its audio signal was supplied by the DDE. As a bonus, this diminutive converter can be tucked away behind a laserdisc player or a preamp/processor. Additional shelf space is not required.

The difference between using a laserdisc player's internal digital-to-analog converter and the DDE v1.1 is like the difference between pumping unleaded regular into the tank of a Ferrari Testarossa, or racing fuel. The results are not subtle. Considering that a serious home theater can easily cost \$10,000 or more, the \$499 outlay a DDE represents is a small price to pay for what it delivers. You need one. I want one. Buy it.

These promising components, and the subtleties of integrating them into dynamic home theaters, show the challenges audio manufacturers face in the home theater market. If they are willing to endure the same kind of healthy growing pains that accompanied their earlier successes, audio companies have the ability to drive the development of future home theater products, as they have driven the development of consumer audio products for the past 25 years.

For further information about these products, call Mondial Designs, 914-693-8005; New England Audio Resources, 207-795-0609; and Audio Alchemy, 818-707-8504.



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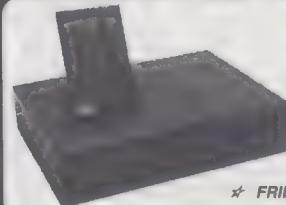


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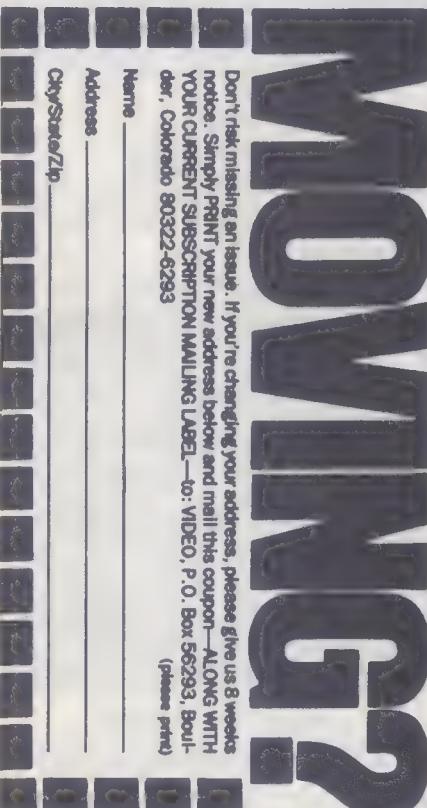
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DIRECTORY

continued from page 69

The Scent of Green Papaya

1993. Tran Yen-Khe; dir. Tran Anh Hung. Servant girl falls for talented composer she works for. Add foreign locale (Vietnam), period (early '60s) and beautiful photography and this '40s Hollywood melodrama/Cinderella romance becomes a must for American "art house" audiences. Winner of Camera D'Or at Cannes. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 104 min. VHS priced for rental. LD \$34.95. Columbia TriStar.

Together Alone

1991. B&W. dir. P.J. Castellaneta. The post-coital talk of a one-night stand turns into a revelatory all-night conversation that's been described as "a carnal version of *My Dinner With Andre*." Mono. (NR) 87 min. VHS \$39.95. Shocking Gray.

Anatomy of Love

1994. Dir. Katherine Gilday. Why do we court, marry, stray, separate and stay together? This two-tape set, through exploring different cultures and individual couples, comes up with some universal answers. Part one covers attraction, chemistry and marriage. Part two covers the underlying reasons for adultery, why couples break up or stay together, and how the tensions and obligations of a marriage can be overcome through love, patience and understanding. Stereo. 190 min. VHS priced for rental. Turner.

Wes Craven's New Nightmare

1994. Stereo. Neat twist as the director of the original *Nightmare on Elm Street*, Wes Craven, finds his own nightmares are causing Freddy to go after the original cast. (R) 111 min VHS priced for rental. LD \$39.99. New Line/ImageIn.

Blue sky

1994. Jessica Lange, Tommy Lee Jones; dir. Tony Richardson. Richardson's last film gives Lange the opportunity to deliver an award-winning performance as a military scientist's wife whose passions are as unpredictable and scandalous as the nuclear testing the military is trying to cover up. Stereo. (PG-13) 101 min. VHS priced for rental, LD \$34.95. Orion.

Penn & Teller's Smoke and Mirrors

1994. Sega CD/MPC CD-ROM. Interactive magic tricks, an eight-hour, real-time, no stopping bus journey, and an action space game where you will always beat your friends because you can cheat. Penn & Teller serve as guides with their usual... humor. Absolute Entertainment.

Antonio Carlos Jobim: An All-Star Tribute

1994. Herbie Hancock, Shirley Horn, Gal Costa, Jon Hendricks, Antonio Carlos Jobim. Concert recording of what was to be Jobim's last appearance; he died in December leaving a legacy of over 400 compositions including "Chega de Saudade (No More Blues)", "Girl From Ipanema" and other instantly recognizable standards, performed here. Stereo. (NR) 60 min. VHS \$19.98. View (800-843-9843).

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Why home theaters are better than movie theaters

"You have to see it in the theater," has been the prime directive for serious film fans since the first Betamax VCR appeared. There's solid reasoning behind this rule. Until a few years ago, home video for most people meant a cheap VHS VCR with mediocre monaural sound and a so-so picture, and a 20-inch TV incapable of resolving more than 330 horizontal lines.

Times have changed, home theaters have grown vastly more sophisticated and accessible. But the prime directive hasn't. Movie fans still consider a good theater the necessary place to see a movie. But it's time to take another look at how much sense this rule still makes. I won't argue that watching a movie in a top-notch theater with an attentive projectionist, a good sound system, a quiet audience and comfortable seats is the best possible theatrical experience. But I will argue with the notion that it's a typical moviegoing experience. After all, when's the last time this happened to you?

The sad truth is that the movie-theater experience ain't what it used to be. Almost every time I've seen a movie in the past few years, flaws in the picture, the sound and the surroundings have distracted me so much that at best I found myself observing the movie: I couldn't lose myself inside it. For example, entertainment editor (and fellow Texan) Ken Korman and I decided that a big-budget action pic like *Cliffhanger* demanded viewing in a "real theater," so we each paid our \$7.50 and squeezed into a couple of seats at a local movie house. As soon as the lights dimmed, we noticed an exit sign hanging on a side wall next to the screen. In every dark scene of the movie, the bright red exit light shining on the screen obscured the left side of the picture. And the rat I noticed scurrying around at the bottom of the screen did nothing to augment

the grandeur of the movie's mountainous setting.

I admit that the presence of a fur-bearing omnivore in New York City didn't exactly shock me, but less urban movie fans have it even worse. All the small-town theaters I've visited in recent years have retained archaic monaural sound systems only a notch above what you'd find in a decent TV set. While their ticket prices are usually

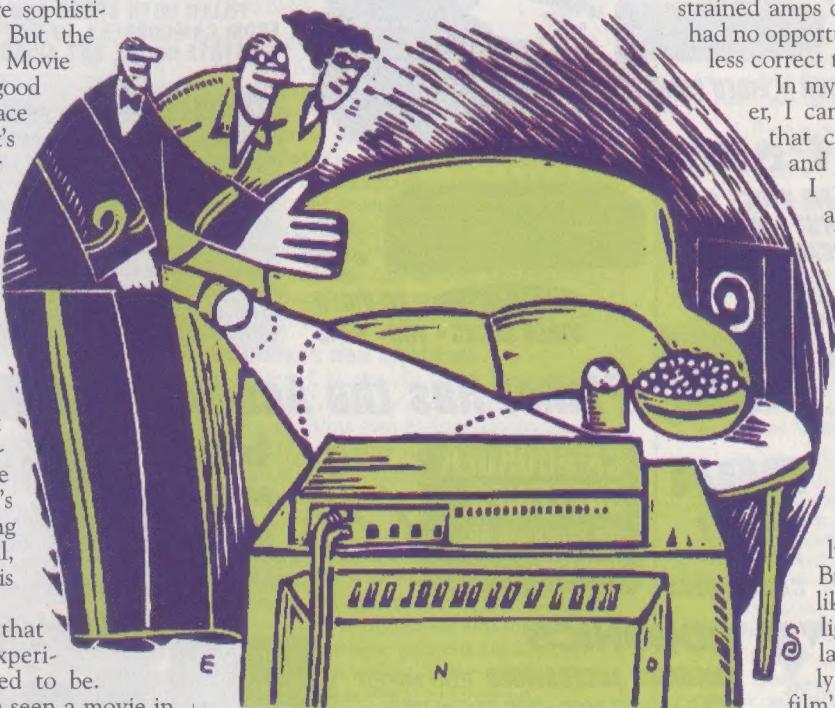
taxing the capabilities of movie-theater sound systems. *Jurassic Park* brought DTS into thousands of theaters last year, but it also brought rattles and distortion, caused, I believe, by the extended dynamic range of DTS. Although I saw *Jurassic Park* at one of Manhattan's better theaters, the ceiling rattled every time the Tyrannosaurus roared. The sound suffered from a harsh edginess, too. Was the cause DTS, strained amps or marginal speakers? I had no opportunity to find out, much less correct the problem.

In my home theater, however, I can correct any problem that comes up immediately, and pause the movie while

I work. The sound is actually better than I've heard in the best movie theaters, and I can set it as loud or soft as I want.

Unless you're fortunate enough to own a data-grade projector and a line-doubler, the picture quality of your home theater system won't equal that of a properly run movie theater. But throw in a problem like poor focus, reflected light from a sign, or a large head seated directly in front of you and film's superior resolution counts for little.

It's time for the old rules to change. A well-equipped, properly set up home theater blows away 95 percent of the commercial movie houses you're likely to attend. Turn out the lights, play the *Apocalypse Now* laserdisc on a good big-screen TV connected to a clean, muscular sound system, and you will be sucked in like you can't be at a movie theater. Your mind won't wander to thoughts of your job or the bills. You'll become one with the movie. Trust me, you haven't really experienced *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* until you've seen it from a comfortable couch, accompanied by a couple of sixes of good beer, a few Mexican cigars and half a dozen enthusiastic buddies.



reasonable, you get what you pay for. Most of these theaters look like they haven't had a good cleaning since the opening night of *Saturday Night Fever*, with the upholstery exuding a mildewy smell I remember from college dorms.

Big-city showcase theaters also exhibit distracting problems. When I saw *The Fugitive* in one of Manhattan's two THX-certified theaters, the picture and sound were great. However, an open window in the projection booth subjected the audience to the projector noise, an annoying click-clack I estimated at 65 decibels.

New digital sound formats like DTS and Dolby Surround Digital are bringing new clarity to film soundtracks, but

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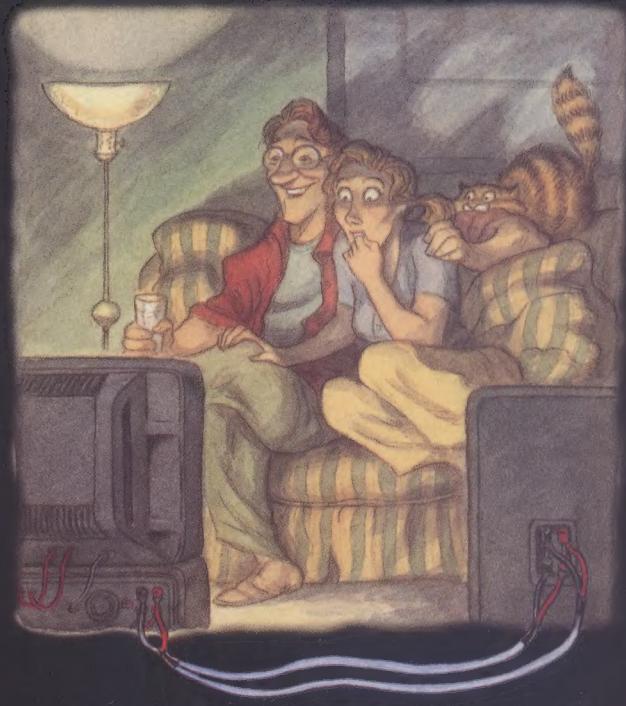
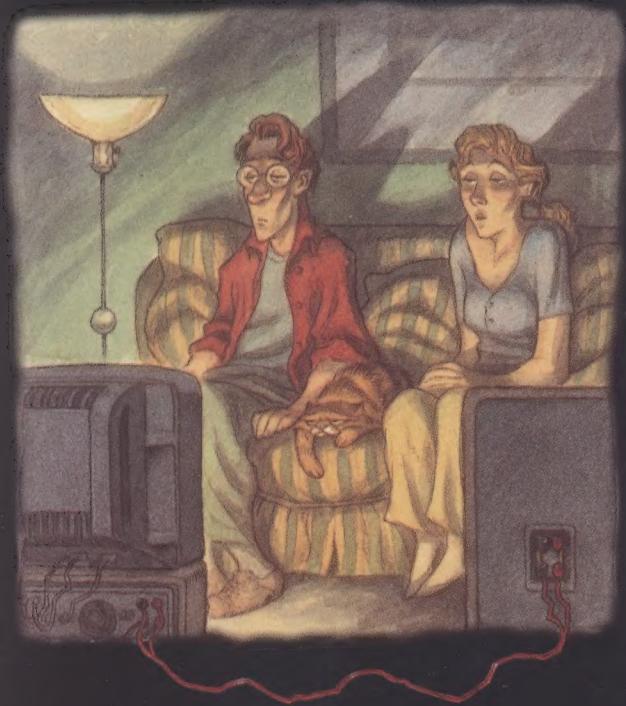
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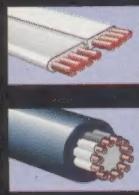
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Which scares you more, a horror film with the sound turned off, or a horror show on the radio? The answer is easy because it is the movie's sound-track which carries the pathos and emotion. You can enjoy sound without pictures, but who wants pictures without sound?

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